

Ecce Homo!
OR
A critical inquiry into the History
of
JESUS CHRIST
K. — being —
A RATIONAL ANALYSIS OF THE GOSPELS.

*Pudet me humani generis cu-
jus mentes et aures talia ferre
potuerunt.*

St. Augustin.
Translated from the French.



LONDON
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1799.



ADVERTISEMENT.

THE Translator has assiduously endeavoured to discover the original author of this anonymous work ; but his researches have hitherto been unsuccessful. If, however, he might venture to hazard a conjecture, he would ascribe it to M. BOULANGER, the learned author of *L'Antiquite Devoilee*.---- Boulanger was an engineer in the service of Louis XV. and his familiarity with Biblical history, and the ancient fathers, probably exceeded that of any thirty clergymen in the kingdom of Great Britain. His writings have been collected in eight volumes, but ECCE HOMO does not appear in this collection. In his last volume, however, which contains a Critical Examination of the Life and Writings of St Paul,* we

* See note (4) p. 335, where our author mentions this *Critique* as a composition of his.

not only find the same doctrines maintained as in the following Inquiry, but also meet with the same references and the same sentiments, while the similarity of stile and manner is so striking and conclusive, that frequently whole sentences, couched in the same expressions, appear in both works. From all these circumstances combined, the Translator thinks himself warranted in attributing ECCE HOMO to this erudite soldier.

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THE

AUTHOR'S PREFACE.

ALTHO' the writings of the Evangelists are in the hands of every one, yet nothing is more uncommon than to find Christians intimately acquainted with the history of the founder of their religion; and even among those who have perused that history, it is still more rare to find any who have ventured seriously to examine it. It must, indeed, be acknowledged, that the ignorance of the one, and the want of reflection in the other, on a subject which they, nevertheless, regard as of infinite importance, may arise from the dislike naturally occasioned by the perusal of the New Testament. In fact, there reign in that work a confusion, an obscurity, and a barbarity of stile, well adapted to confound the ignorant, and disgust enlightened minds. Scarcely is there a history, ancient or modern, which does not possess more method and perspicuity than that of Jesus Christ: And we do not perceive that the Holy Ghost, its putative author, has surpassed, or even equalled, many profane historians, whose writings, however, are not of the same importance to mankind. Our Théologists themselves confess, that the Apostles were illiterate men, and of coarse manners. It does not appear, that the Spirit

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of God, which inspired them, troubled itself with rectifying their defects; — on the contrary, it seems to have itself adopted them, — to have accommodated itself to the weak understandings of its instruments, — and to have inspired them with works, wherein we meet not with the judgment, order, or precision, that are found in several human compositions. Hence, the Gospels present us with a confused assemblage of prodigies, anachronisms, and contradictions, in which criticism loses itself, and which would make any other book be rejected with contempt.

It is by mysteries they prepare the mind to respect religion and its teachers. We are therefore warranted to suspect, that the obscurity of these writings has not been diffused without design. In matters of religion it is prudent never to speak very distinctly. Truths, simple and easily understood, do not strike the human imagination in so lively a manner, as ambiguous oracles and impenetrable mysteries. Moreover, Jesus Christ, altho' come on purpose to enlighten the world, was to be a *stumbling-block* to most people. The small number of the elect, the difficulty of salvation, and the danger of exercising reason, are every where announced in the Gospel — In a word, every thing seems to demonstrate, that God has sent his dear Son to the nations on purpose only to enslave them; and that they should not comprehend any part of the religion which he meant to promulgate. In this the Eternal appears to have intended to throw mortals into darkness, perplexity, a diffidence of themselves, and a continual embarrassment, obliging them to have recourse every moment to these infallible luminaries, their priests, and

to remain for ever under the tutelage of the church. Her ministers, we know, possess exclusively the privilege of understanding and explaining the holy scriptures; and no mortal can expect to obtain future felicity, if he does not pay the submission due to their decisions.

Thus, it belongs not to the vulgar to examine religion—On mere inspection of the Gospel every Christian ought to be convinced that the book is divine,—that every word contained in it is inspired by the Holy Ghost, (1) — and that the explanations, given by the church, of that celestial work in like manner emanate from the Most High. In the first ages of Christianity, the persons who embraced the religion of Jesus were only some of the dregs of the people, consequently, very simple, unacquainted with letters, and disposed to believe all the wonders any one chose to announce. Jesus, in his sermons, addressed himself to the vulgar only—he would have intercourse with none but persons of that cast—he constantly refused to work miracles in presence of the most clear-sighted people of the nation—he inveighed unceasingly against the learned, the doctors, and the rich; in a word, against those in whom he could not find the pliability necessary for adopting his maxims. We see him continually extolling poorneſs of spirit, simplicity, and faith. (2)

His disciples, and after them the ministers of the church, have faithfully followed his footsteps; they have always represented faith, or blind submission, as the first of virtues, as the disposition most agreeable to God, and most necessary to salvation. This principle serves for a basis to the Christian religion, and, above

all, to the power of the clergy. The pastors, therefore, who succeeded the Apostles, employed the greatest care, in secreting the Gospels from the inspection of all who were not initiated in the mysteries of religion. They exhibited these books to those only, whose faith they had tried, that is, whom they knew already disposed to regard them as divine. This mysterious spirit has been transmitted down even to our days.— In several countries the commonalty among Christians are interdicted from perusing the Scriptures, especially in the Romish communion, whose clergy are best acquainted with the manner of governing mankind. The Council of Trent has decreed in the most explicit manner, that “it belongs to the church alone to decide on the true meaning of the Scriptures, and give their interpretation.” (3)

It is true, the reading of the sacred books is permitted, and even recommended to the Protestants, that is, to those Christians, who, after the lapse of some centuries, separated themselves from the Romish church. Moreover, they are enjoined to examine their religion; but faith ought always to precede that reading, and follow that examination; so that before reading, a Protestant is bound to believe the Gospel to be divine; and the examination, which he makes of it, is allowable only, while he finds there what the ministers of his sect have resolved that he could find; beyond this, he is regarded as an ungodly man, and often punished for the weakness of his intellects.

We must then conclude, that the salvation of Christians depends neither on the reading nor understand-

ing of the gospel and sacred books, but in the firm belief, that these books are divine. If, unfortunately, the reading or examination which a person makes of them, does not coincide with the decisions, interpretations, and commentaries of the church, (that is to say, of the priests, who as the heads of every sect, regulate the particular manner of reading and understanding the Scriptures,) he is in danger of being ruined, and of incurring eternal damnation. To *read* the gospel, he must commence with having faith, that is, with being disposed blindly to believe all which that book contains;—to *examine* the gospel, there is likewise a necessity for faith, that is, for being firmly resolved to find nothing there but the holy and the adorable: In fine, to *understand* the gospel, there is still a necessity for faith, that is, for a-fixed persuasion, that our priests can never either be themselves deceived, or wish to deceive others, in the manner they explain it. “Believe,” say they to us, “believe on our word, that this book is the work of God himself; if you dare to doubt it, you shall be damned. Are you unable to comprehend any of what God reveals to you there? *Believe evermore*:—God has revealed himself that he may not be understood. *The glory of God is to conceal his word*; (4) or rather by speaking in an unintelligible manner, does not God intimate that he wants every one to refer it to us, to whom he has confided his important secrets?—A truth, of which you must not doubt, seeing that we persecute in this world, and damn in the other, whoever dares to question the testimony which we bear to ourselves.”

However erroneous this reasoning may appear to the profane, it is sufficient for the greater part of believers : —Where, therefore, they do not read the gospel, or where they do read it, they do not examine it ; where they examine, it is with prejudiced eyes, and with a fixed determination to find there only what shall be conformable to their own prejudices and the interests of their guides. In consistency with his fears and prepossessions a Christian believes himself lost, should he find in the sacred books reasons to doubt the veracity of his priests.

With such dispositions it is not surprising to see men persisting in their ignorance, and making a merit of rejecting the lights which reason offers them. Thus it is, that error is perpetuated, and that nations, in concert with those who deceive them, bestow on interested cheats an unbounded confidence, in what they regard as of the greatest importance to their own felicity. But the darkness, which for so many ages has enveloped the human mind, begins to dissipate ; in spite of the tyrannic cares of their jealous guides, mankind seem desirous to burst from the pupilage, wherein so many causes combine in attempting to retain them. The ignorance in which the priesthood fostered the credulous has vanished from amongst many nations ; the despotism of priests is enfeebled in several flourishing states ; science has rendered the mind more liberal, and mankind begin to blush at the ignominious fetters, under which the clergy have so long made both kings and people groan.* In fine, the human mind seems struggling in every country to break in pieces its chains.

Having premised this, we proceed to examine, without any prejudice, the life of Jesus Christ.—We will deduce our facts from the Gospels only ; that is, from memorials revered and acknowledged by the doctors of the Christian religion. To illustrate those facts, we will employ the aid of criticism. We will exhibit, in the simplest manner, the conduct, maxims, and policy of an obscure legislator, who, after his death, acquired a celebrity to which there is no reason for presuming that he pretended while alive. We will contemplate in its cradle a religion which, at first destined solely for the vilest populace of a nation the most abject, the most credulous, and the most stupid on earth, became, by little and little, mistress of the Romans, the firebrand of nations, the absolute sovereign of European monarchs, arbiter of the destiny of kingdoms,—the cause of their friendship, and of their hate ; the cement which serves to strengthen their alliance or their discord, and the leaven always ready to put minds in fermentation. In fine, we shall behold an artisan, a melancholy enthusiast, and unskillful juggler bursting out of a carpenter's shop, in order to deceive men of his own cast ; miscarrying in all his projects, himself punished as a public incendiary, dying on a cross, and yet after his death becoming the legislator and the God of many nations, and an object of adoration to beings who pretend to common sense.

There is every reason to believe, that if the Holy Ghost had foreseen the transcendent fortune which the religion of Jesus was one day to attain ; if he had foreseen that this religion would in the course of time be received by kings, civilized nations, scholars, and per-

sons in the higher circles of life ; if he had suspected that this religion would be examined, analysed, discussed and criticised by logicians ; there is, I say, reason to believe that the Holy Ghost would have left us, on the life and doctrine of its founder, memoirs less shapeless, facts more circumstantial, proofs more authentic, and, in short, materials better digested than those we possess. He would have chosen writers, better qualified than those he has inspired, to transmit to nations the speeches and actions of the Saviour of the World ; he would have made him, on the most trifling point, to act and speak in a manner more worthy of a God ; he would have put in his mouth a language more noble, more perspicuous and more persuasive ; and he would have employed means more certain to convince rebellious reason, and abash incredulity.

None of all this has occurred ; the gospel is merely an eastern romance, disgusting to every man of common sense, and apparently addressed to the ignorant, the stupid, and the vulgar, the only persons whom it can mislead. (5)—Criticism finds there no connection of facts, no agreement of circumstances, no train of principles, and no uniformity of relation. Four men, unpolished and devoid of letters, pass for the faithful authors of memoirs containing the life of Jesus Christ ; and it is on their testimony, that Christians believe themselves bound to receive the religion they profess, and adopt without examination the most contradictory facts, the the most incredible actions, the most amazing prodigies, the most unconnected system, the most unintelligible doctrine, and the most revolting mysteries !

Supposing, however, that the Gospels in our hands belong to the authors to whom they are attributed, that is to say, were in reality written by Apostles or disciples of Apostles, should it not follow from this alone, that their testimony ought to be suspected? Could not men, whom they describe as ignorant, and destitute of parts, be themselves deceived? Could not enthusiasts and very credulous fanatics imagine, that they had seen many things which never existed, and thus become the dupes of deception? Could not impostors, strongly attached to a sect whereby they subsisted, and which therefore they had an interest to support, attest miracles, and publish facts, with the falsehood of which they were well acquainted? Moreover, could not the first Christians, by a *pious fraud*, afterwards add or retrench things essential to the works ascribed to these Apostles? — We know that Origen, so early as the third century, complained loudly of the corruption of manuscripts. “What shall we say,” exclaims he, “of the errors of transcribers, and of the impious temerity with which they have corrected the text? What shall we say of the licence of those who promiscuously interpolate or erase at their pleasure?”

All these questions form warrantable prejudices against the persons to whom the Gospels have been ascribed, and against the purity of their text. It is also extremely difficult to ascertain, with any degree of certainty, whether those Gospels belong to the authors whose names they bear. It is a well known fact, that in the first ages of Christianity there was a very great number of Gospels, different from one another, and composed for the use of different churches and differ-

ent sects of Christians. The truth of this has been confessed by ecclesiastical historians of the greatest credit. (6)—There is therefore reason to suspect, that the persons who composed these Gospels, with the view of giving more weight to them, might have attributed them to Apostles, or Disciples, who actually had no share in them. That idea, once adopted by ignorant and credulous Christians, might be transmitted from age to age, and pass at last for unquestionable, in times when it was no longer possible to ascertain the authors or the facts related.

Be that as it may, among some fifty gospels, with which Christianity in its commencement was inundated, the church, assembled in council at Nice, chose four of them only, and rejected the rest as apocryphal, although the latter had nothing more ridiculous in them than those which were admitted. Thus at the end of three centuries, (*i. e.* in the three hundred and twenty-fifth year of the Christian Era,) some bishops decided, that these four Gospels were the only ones which ought to be adopted, or which had been really inspired by the Holy Ghost. A miracle enabled them to discover this important truth, so difficult to be discerned, at a time even then not very remote from that of the apostles. They placed, it is said, promiscuously, books apocryphal and authentic under an altar:—the Fathers of the Council betook themselves to prayers, in order to obtain of the Lord, that he would permit the false or doubtful books to remain *under* the altar,—whilst those which were truly inspired by the Holy Ghost should place themselves above it—a circumstance which did not fail to occur. It is then on

this miracle that our faith depends ! It is to it that Christians owe the assurance of possessing the true Gospels, or faithful memoirs of the life of Christ ! It is from these only they are permitted to deduce the principles of their belief, and the rules of conduct which they ought to observe, in order to obtain eternal salvation !

Thus, the authority of the books which serve for the basis of the Christian religion, is founded solely on the authority of a council, that is, of an assembly of priests and bishops. But these bishops and priests, judges and parties in an affair wherein they were visibly interested, could they not be themselves deceived ? Independently of the apocryphal miracle, which enabled them to distinguish the true Gospels from the false, had they any sign, which could fairly enable them to distinguish the writings which they ought to receive from those which they ought to reject ?

Some will tell us, that the church assembled in a general council is infallible ; that then the Holy Ghost inspires it, and that its decisions ought to be regarded as those of God himself. If we demand, where is the proof that the church enjoys this infallibility ? it will be answered that the gospel assures it, and that Jesus Christ has expressly promised to assist and enlighten his church until the consummation of ages. Here the incredulous will reply, that the church then, or its ministers, create rights to themselves ; for it is their authority which alone establishes the authenticity of books whereby their own authority is established ; this is obviously a circle of errors.* In short, an assembly of bishops and priests has decided, that the books which

attribute to themselves an infallible authority have been divinely inspired.

Notwithstanding that decision, there still remain some difficulties on the authenticity of the gospels. In the first place, it may be asked, whether the decision of the Council of Nice composed of three hundred and eighteen bishops, ought to be regarded as that of the universal church? Were all who formed that assembly entirely of the same opinion among themselves? Were there no disputes among these men inspired by the Holy Ghost? Was their decision unanimously accepted? Had not the secular authority of Constantine a chief share in the adoption of the decrees of that celebrated council? In this case, was it not the Imperial power, rather than the spiritual authority, which decided the authenticity of the Gospels?

In the second place, many theologists agree, that the universal church, altho' infallible in dogma, may err in *facts*; now it is evident, that in the case alluded to, dogma depends on fact. Indeed, before deciding whether the dogmas contained in the Gospels be divine, it was necessary to know, beyond the possibility of a doubt, whether the four Gospels in question were really written by the inspired authors to whom they are ascribed; this is obviously *a fact*. It was farther necessary to know, whether these Gospels have never been altered, mutilated, augmented, interpolated, or falsified by the different hands thro' which they have passed in the course of three centuries; this is likewise *a fact*. Can the fathers of the church infallibly guarantee the probity of all the depositaries of those writings, and the exactness of all the transcribers? Can these fa-

thers decide definitively, that during so long a period no one could insert in these memoirs marvellous relations or dogmas unknown to the writers, who are their putative authors? Does not ecclesiastical history inform us, that in the origin of Christianity there were schisms, disputes, heresies, and sects without number; and each of the disputants founded equally his opinions on the gospel? Even in the time of the Council of Nice do we not find, that the whole church was divided on the fundamental article of the Christian religion, I mean on the divinity of Christ?

Thus on considering the matter closely, we will find, that the Council of Nice was the true institutor of Christianity, which till then, wandered at random, was ignorant of Jesus being a God, had not any authentic gospels, wanted a stable law, and had no code of doctrine whereon to rely. A number of bishops and priests, very few in comparison of those who composed the whole Christian church, and these bishops very little in union among themselves, have decided on the point most essential to the salvation of nations. They have decided on the divinity of Jesus; on the authenticity of the gospels; they have decided, that according to these gospels, their own authority ought to be deemed infallible; in a word, they have decided on faith. Nevertheless, their decisions might have remained without force, if they had not been backed by the authority of Constantine. This prince gave prevalence to the opinion of these fathers of the council, who knew how to draw him *for a time* to their side, (7) and who, amidst this multitude of gospels and writings, with which Christianity was in-

nundated, did not fail to declare those divine, which they judged most conformable to their own particular opinions, or to the ruling faction. In religion, as in other things, *the reasoning of the stronger party is always the best.*

Behold then, in the last resort, the authority of an emperor, who determines the chief points of the Christian religion ! This emperor but little fixed in his own faith, decides, *until farther orders*, that Jesus is consubstantial with the Father, and compels his subjects to receive as inspired the four gospels we have in our hands. It is in these memoirs, exclusively adopted by some fathers in the Council of Nice ; by them attributed to apostles or unexceptionable witnesses, inspired by the Holy Ghost ; by them proposed to serve as an indispensable rule to Christians,—we are to seek for the materials of our history. We will state them with fidelity ; we will compare, and we will connect the relations, often discordant, which they contain ; we will see, if the facts they detail are worthy of God, and adapted to procure mankind the advantages they expect. This enquiry will enable us to judge rightly of the Christian religion, of the degree of confidence we ought to have in it, of the esteem we ought to entertain for its lessons and dogmas, and of the idea we should form of Jesus its founder.

Altho' in composing this history we have laid it down as a rule to employ the Gospels only, that is, materials approved by the church, we presume not to flatter ourselves, that it will please every body, or that the church will adopt our labours. The connections which we shall form, the interpretations we shall give, the animadversions we shall present to

readers, will not be always entirely agreeable to the views of our spiritual guides, the greater part of whom are enemies to all enquiry. But we will state to them, that criticism gives a new lustre to truth; that to reject all examination is to acknowledge the weakness of their cause; and that not to wish for discussion is to avow it to be incapable of sustaining a trial.

If they tell us that our ideas are wholly repugnant to the decisions of councils, of the fathers, and universal church, we will answer, that according to the sacred books opposition is not always a crime; we will plead the example of an apostle, to whom the Christian religion is under the greatest obligations,—what do I say! to whom alone it perhaps owes its existence. Now this apostle boasts of *having withstood the great St. Peter to his face*, that visible head of the church appointed by Christ himself to feed his flock, and whose infallibility, therefore, is at least as probable as that of his successors, and even that of the church assembled in oecumenical council.

If they tax us with *innovation*, we will plead the example of Jesus himself, who was regarded as an *innovator* by the Jews, so much prepossessed in favour of their ancient law, and who was a martyr for the reform he wanted to introduce. We, however candidly declare, that we have no desire to imitate him therein; we applaud only *to the martyrdom* exclusively.—If the tenets advanced be unacceptable, as the author pretends not to divine inspiration, he leaves to every one the liberty of rejecting or receiving his interpretations, and method of investigation. He does not menace with eter-

nal torments such as resist his arguments ; he has not credit enough to promise heaven to such as yield to them : he pretends neither to constrain nor seduce those who do not think as he does : he is desirous only to calm the mind, allay animosity, and soothe the passions of those zealots, who are ever ready to harass their fellow-creatures, on account of opinions, which may not appear equally convincing to all the world. He proposes to point out the ridiculous cruelty of those men of blood, who persecute for dogmas which they themselves do not understand. He ventures to flatter himself that such of his readers as peruse this enquiry with coolness, will acknowledge, that it is very possible to doubt of the inspiration of the Evangelical authors, and of the divine mission of a charlatan of Judea, without ceasing, notwithstanding that, to be a rational and honest man.

Such as are exasperated against this work, are entreated to remember, that faith is a gift of heaven, that *want is no vice*, that if the Jews did not believe in the wonders of Christ, whereof they were eye-witnesses, it is very pardonable to doubt them at the end of the eighteenth century, especially on finding those marvels transmitted by writers whom the Holy Ghost has not thought proper to inspire uniformly, nor place in harmony with each other. — In fine, fiery devotees are earnestly entreated to moderate their holy rage, and suffer the meekness so strongly recommended by their divine Saviour to occupy sometimes the place of that bitter zeal and persecuting spirit, which creates so many enemies to the Christian religion and its doctors. Let them remember, that if it is to patience and

forbearance Christ promises the possession of the earth, it is much to be feared that pride, intolerance, and inhumanity, will render the ministers of the church detestable; and make them lose that empire over minds, which to them appears so agreeable. If they wish to reign over rational men, they must display reason, knowledge,—and, above all, virtues more useful than those wherewith the Gospel has so long infested societies.

Jesus has said, in the clearest manner, *Happy are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth*; unless interpreters should contrive, that this only signifies the necessity of persecuting, exterminating, and cutting the throats of those whose affections they wish to gain.

If it was permitted to cite the maxim of a profane person by the side of that of the Son of God, we would relate here the apophthegm of the profound Machiavel, that “empires are preserved by the same means whereby they are established.” — It was by dint of meekness, patience, and precaution, that the disciples of Christ succeeded in establishing Christianity. Their successors have employed violence, but not until they found themselves supported by devout tyrants. Since then, the Gospel of peace has been the signal of war,—the pacific disciples of Jesus have become implacable warriors, have treated each other as ferocious beasts; and the church has been perpetually torn by dissensions, schisms, and factions. If the primitive spirit of patience and meekness does not quickly return to the aid of religion, it is to be feared that it will become the object of the hatred of nations, who begin to feel that morality is preferable to ob-

four dogmas, and that peace is of greater value than the holy frenzy of the ministers of the Gospel.

One cannot, therefore, with too much earnestness, exhort them, for their own sakes, to moderation. Let them imitate their divine Master, who never employed his Father's power to exterminate the Jews, of whom he had so much to complain. He did not make the armies of heaven descend in order to establish his doctrine; he chose rather to surrender himself to the secular arm, than give up to it the infidels, whom his prodigies and transcendent reasoning could not persuade. Altho' he was the depositary of the power of the Most High; altho' he was evidently inspired by his Holy Spirit; altho' he had at his command all the angels of paradise, we do not find that he has performed any great miracles on the understandings of his auditory; he suffered them to remain in their blindness, altho' he had come on purpose to enlighten them. We cannot doubt but that a conduct so wise, was intended to make the pastors of his church, (to whom we do not find, that he has bequeathed a power of convincing and converting more effectual than what he himself possessed,) to make them, I say, sensible, that it is not by violence they can reconcile the mind to incredible things, and that it would be unjust to force others to comprehend what, without favour from above, it would be impossible for themselves to comprehend, or what, even with such favour, they but very imperfectly understand.

But it is time to conclude a preface, perhaps already too long, to a work, which, even without preamble, may be very tiresome to the clergy, and irritate

the temper of the devout, particularly of female devotees. The author does himself the justice to believe, that he has said enough to be allowed the privilege of expecting to be attacked by a cloud of writers, obliged by situation to repel his blows, and to defend, right or wrong, a cause wherein they are so much interested. He reckons that on his death, his book will be cruelly caluminated, his reputation torn, and his arguments taken to pieces or *mutilated*. He expects to be treated as impious, a blasphemer, and *antichrift*; he will have the chagrin to find himself loaded with all the epithets, which the barkers of Israel are in use to lavish upon those who disquiet them. He will not however sleep the less tranquil for that; but as it may happen, that his sleep might prevent him at the time from replying, he thinks it his duty to inform his pious antagonists before hand, that *injuries are not reasons*. He does more; he bequeaths them charitable advice, to which the defenders of religion do not usually pay enough attention. They are then advertised, that, if in their learned refutations they prove unable to resolve completely all the objections brought against them, they have done nothing for their cause. The infallible defenders of a religion in which, it is affirmed, that every thing is divinely inspired, are bound not to leave a single argument behind, and ought to be convinced that answering to an argument is not always setting it aside. They should please also to keep in remembrance, that a single falsehood, a single absurdity, a single contradiction or a single blunder, fairly pointed out in the Gospel, should be sufficient to render suspected, and even to o-

vertun the authority of a book, which ought to be perfect in all parts, if it be true that it is the work of an infinitely perfect being: an incredulous person being but a man, may sometimes reason wrong, but it is never permitted to a God, or his instruments, either to contradict themselves or to talk nonsense.

CRITICAL ENQUIRY

INTO

THE HISTORY OF JESUS CHRIST,

&c.

CHAPTER FIRST.

ACCOUNT OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE AND THEIR PROPHETS---
ENQUIRY INTO THE PROPHECIES RELATING TO
JESUS.

HOWEVER cursorily one throws his eyes on the history of the Jews, such as it is transmitted to us in their sacred books, he will be forced to acknowledge, that this people were at all times the blindest, the most stupid, the most credulous, the most superstitious and the silliest that ever appeared on earth. Moses,† by dint of miracles or delusions, succeeded in subjugating the Israelites; after having liberated them from the iron rod of the Egyptians, he put them under his own,

This celebrated legislator, in the writings and institutions ascribed to him, had evidently no other intention than to subject the Hebrews for ever to his purposes, and, after himself, to render them the slaves of his family and tribe. It is indeed obvious, that the Moisaical œconomy had no other object, than to deliver up the people of Israel to the tyranny and extortions of priests and Levites, whom the law, promulgated in name of the Eternal, authorised to devour the rest of the nation, and crush them under an unsupportable yoke. In short, the chosen people of God appear destined solely to be the prey of the priesthood, to satiate their avarice and ambition, and to become the instrument and victim of their passions.

Hence by their law, and policy of their priests, the people of God were kept in a profound ignorance, in an abject superstition, in an unsocial and savage aversion for the rest of mankind, in an inveterate hatred of other forms of worship, and in a barbarous and sanguinary intolerance towards every foreign religion. All the neighbours of the Hebrews were therefore their enemies: if the holy nation was the object of the love of the Most High, it was an object of contempt and horror to all those who had occasion to know it—Thanks to its religious institutions and to the labours of its priests, its diviners, and its prophets, who continually profited by its credulity in displaying wonders, and kindling its delirium! (1.)

Under the conduct of Moses, and of generals or judges who governed them afterwards, the Jewish peo-

ple distinguished themselves only by massacres, unjust wars, cruelties, usurpations and infamies, which were enjoined on them in the name of the Eternal.—Wearry of the government of their priests, which drew upon them only misfortunes and bloody defeats, this people demanded kings; but under these princes the state was perpetually torn with disputes between the priesthood and the government. Superstition wished always to rule over policy; prophets and priests pretended to reign over kings, of whom such as were not sufficiently submissive to the interpreters of heaven, were renounced by the Lord, and from that time unacknowledged and opposed by their own subjects. Fanatics and impostors, absolute masters of the understanding of their nation, were continually ready to rouse it, and excite in its bosom the most terrible revolutions. It was the intrigues of the prophets that deprived Saul of his crown, and bestowed it on David, *the man according to God's own heart*, that is to say, so devoted to the will of the priests. It was the prophets, who, to punish the defection of Solomon in the person of his son, occasioned the separation of the kingdoms of Judea and Israel. It was the prophets who kept these two kingdoms continually at variance, weakened them by means of one another, desolated them by religious wars, and in short, conducted them to complete ruin, a total dispersion of their inhabitants, and a long captivity among the Assyrians.

So many calamities did not however open the eyes of the Jews, who were obstinate in refusing to acknowledge the true source of their misfortunes. Restored

to their homes by the bounty of Cyrus, they were again governed by priests and prophets, whose maxims rendered them turbulent, and drew on them the hatred of Sovereigns, who subdued them.—The Greek princes treated with the greatest severity a people, whom the oracles and promises of their prophets rendered always rebellious and ungovernable. In short, this people became the prey of the Romans, whose yoke they bore with fear, and against whom impostors often incited them to revolt, and who at last, tired of their frequent rebellions, entirely destroyed them.

Such is, in few words, the history of the Jewish people. It presents the most memorable examples of the evils which fanaticism and superstition produce :—for it is evident, that the continual revolutions, bloody wars, and total destruction of that nation, had no other cause than its unwearied credulity, its submission to priests, its enthusiasm, and its furious zeal, excited by the inspired. In a word, on reading the Bible one is forced to confess that the people of God, thanks to the roguery of their spiritual guides, were, beyond contradiction, the most unfortunate people that ever existed. (2)

Yet the most solemn promises of Jehovah seemed to assure to that people a flourishing and puissant empire. God had made an eternal alliance with Abraham and his posterity ; the Jews, far from reaping the fruits of this alliance, and far from enjoying the prosperity they had been led to expect, lived continually in the midst of calamities, and were, more than all other nations

the sport of frightful revolutions. So many disasters, however, were incapable of rendering them more considerate; the experience of so many ages did not hinder them from relying on oracles so often contradicted; and the more unfortunate they saw themselves, the more rooted were they in their credulity. The destruction of their nation could not bring them to doubt either of the excellence of their law, the wisdom of their institutions, or the veracity of their prophets, who successively relieved each other, either in menacing them in the name of the Lord, or in reanimating their frivolous hopes.

Strongly convinced that they were the sacred and chosen people of the Most High, alone worthy of his favours, the Jews, in spite of all their miseries, were continually persuaded that their God could not have abandoned them. They therefore constantly looked for an end to their afflictions, and promised themselves a deliverance, which obscure oracles made them expect. Building on these fanatical notions, they were at all times disposed to listen with avidity to every man who announced himself as inspired by Heaven; they eagerly ran after every singular personage who could feed their expectations; they followed whoever had the secret of astonishing them by impostures, which their stupidity made them take for miracles, supernatural works, and unquestionable signs of divine power. Disposed to see the marvellous in the most trifling events, every adroit impostor was on the watch to deceive them, and was certain of making more or less adherents, especially among the

populace, who every where are destitute of experience and knowledge.

It was in the midst of a people of this disposition, that the personage appeared whose history we write. He very soon found followers among the most despicable of the rabble ; seconded by these he preached, as usual, reformation to his fellow-citizens ; he wrought wonders ; he styled himself the envoy of the divinity ; he particularly founded his mission on vague, obscure and ambiguous predictions, contained in the sacred books of the Jews ; he applied them to himself ; he announced himself as the *Messiah* or messenger, the deliverer of Israel, who for so many ages was the object of the nation's hope. His disciples, his adherents and afterwards their successors, have found means to apply to their Master the ancient prophecies, wherein he seemed the least perceptibly designed. The Christians docile and full of faith, have had the good fortune to see the founder of their religion predicted in the clearest manner throughout the whole old Testament. By dint of allegories, figures, interpretations, and commentaries, their doctors have brought them to see in this shapeless compilation all that they had an interest in pointing out to them. — When passages taken literally did not countenance deceit agreeable to their views, they contrived for them a twofold sense ; they pretended, that it was not necessary to understand them literally, but to give them a *mystical, allegorical* and *spiritual* sense. To explain, therefore, these pretended predictions, they continually substituted one name for another : they rejected the literal sense, in order to adopt a figu-

rative one; they changed the most natural signification of words; they applied the same passages to events quite opposite; they retrenched the names of some personages plainly designed, in order to put in their place that of Jesus; in short, they did not blush to make the most crying abuse of the principles of language.

The third chapter of Genesis furnishes us with a striking example of the manner in which the doctors of the Christian religion have allegorised passages of scripture, that is, having given them a twist in order to apply them to Jesus. In this chapter God says to the serpent, convicted of having seduced the woman, *The seed of the woman shall bruise thy head.* This prophecy appears with so much the more difficulty to apply to Christ, that these words follow the preceding, *and thou shalt bruise his heel.* One is much embarrassed to comprehend, why that *seed of the woman* must be understood of Jesus. If he was *the Son of God*, or God himself, he could not be produced from the *seed of the woman*; if he was man, he is not pointed out in a particular manner by these words; for all men, without exception, are produced from *the seed of women.* According to our interpreters, the serpent is sin; the seed of the woman that bruises it, is Jesus incarnate in the womb of Mary. Nevertheless, since the coming of Christ, sin, typified by the serpent, has at all times subsisted; from which circumstance it is warrantable to conclude, that Jesus Christ has not destroyed it, and that therefore the prediction is neither literally nor allegorically accomplished.

In the 22d chapter of Genesis, God promises to Abraham, that in his seed *all the nations of the earth shall be blessed*. What we stile prosperity, the Hebrews termed blessings. If Abraham and his race enjoyed a continued prosperity, it was only for a very short period; the Hebrews became afterwards the slaves of the Egyptians, and were, as has been seen, the most unfortunate people on earth. Christians have also given a mystic sense to that prophecy—they substitute the name of Jesus in place of that of Abraham, and it is in him that all the nations shall be blessed; the advantages they shall enjoy will be persecutions, calamities, and misfortunes of every kind; and his disciples, like himself, shall undergo the most painful punishments. Hence we see that, following our interpreters, the word *blessings* has changed its meaning; it no longer implies prosperity; it signifies what, in ordinary language, is termed curses, disasters, afflictions, troubles, divisions, and religious wars; in short, calamities with which the Christian nations have been continually *blest* since the establishment of the church. (3)

Christians believe especially, that they see Jesus expressly announced in the 49th chapter of Genesis—The patriarch Jacob there promises sovereign power to Judah. *The sceptre, says he, shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come, and unto him shall the gathering of the people be.* It is thus that several interpreters translate the

(3) See chapter XVIII. of this work.

tenth verse of the 49th chapter of Genesis. Others have translated it thus ; *the authority shall for ever be in Judah, when the Messiah shall have come.* Others read : *the authority shall be in Judah, till the messenger receive in Shiloh the sovereign power.* Others again render the passage in this manner ; *the people of Judah shall be in affliction till the messenger of the Lord comes to put an end to it ;* and according to others, *till the city of Shiloh be destroyed.*

This diversity in the translation of the same passage ought unquestionably to render that prophecy very suspicious. First, We see that it is impossible to determine the signification of the word *Shiloh*, or to learn, whether it be the name of a man or a city. Secondly, It is proved by the sacred books, received equally by Jews and Christians, that the sovereign power is gone from Judah, was wholly annihilated during the Babylonish captivity, and has not been re-established since. If it is pretended, that Jesus came to re-establish the power of Judah, we will assert, that, on the contrary, in the time of Christ Judah was without authority, for Judah had submitted to the Romans. — Our doctors, therefore, have again recourse to allegory : according to them the power of Judah was the spiritual power of Jesus over Christians designed by *Judah*.

The same doctors, in like manner, see Christ announced by Balaam, who by-the-bye was only a false prophet. He thus expresses himself in the 24th chapter of Numbers, v. 16, 17. *He hath said, who heard the*

words of God, and knew the knowledge of the Most High, who saw the vision of the Almighty, falling into a trance, but having his eyes open : I shall see him but not now, I shall behold him but not nigh ; there shall come a star out of Jacob, and a sceptre shall rise out of Israel, &c. In this unintelligible jargon, they pretend to shew Christians a clear prediction of the founder of their religion. It is he who is the star, because his luminous doctrine enlightens all minds. *This sceptre, which shall rise out of Israel,* is the cross of Christ, by the aid of which he has triumphed over the Devil, who, in spite of this victory, ceases not to reign still on earth, and render useless the triumph of Jesus.

But of all the prophecies contained in the old Testament, there is not one to which the Christian doctors have attached more importance than that found in Isaiah, chap. vii. ver. 14 : *A virgin, or a young woman, (for the Hebrew word signifies both,) shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.*—To find out Jesus Christ in this prediction, it is first of all necessary to be convinced, that this virgin or woman is *Mary* ; next it is necessary, not to entertain a doubt, whether *Immanuel* be the same with Jesus. It has been objected, and will always be objected, against this prophecy, that it is sufficient to read the chapter of Isaiah from whence the passage is taken, to be satisfied that the prophet has in view *Ahaz* king of Judah. In fact, this prince is there represented as in consternation, on account of the arrival of Rezin and Pekah, kings of Syria and Israel, who, with their united forces, threatened his dominions. Isaiah encourages him, by

representing that he still has forces sufficient; he promises him the assistance of the Lord, whom every prophet made always to be of his own party. To guarantee the truth of his promises, Isaiah tells his sovereign, that the latter has only to ask of him a sign.—The dispirited prince replies, that he does not wish to tempt the Lord. The prophet, however, wishing to convince him, announces a sign—"A young woman," says he, "shall conceive, and bring forth a son, who shall be called Immanuel." Now, the following chapter informs us who this young woman was—She was the wife of Isaiah himself—"I took unto me," says he, "faithful witnesses. — — And I went unto the prophets, and she conceived and bare a son." The simple inspection of this text seems to carry the cause in favour of the incredulous, who maintain, that this prophecy is in no respect applicable to Jesus; but Theologists have the privilege of interpreting it in the manner most favourable to their own purposes, without reckoning on the suffrage of St Matthew, who was divinely inspired, as the fathers of the Council of Nice have decided without appeal.

Proceeding forward in the perusal of Isaiah, (chap. ix. ver. 6) we find the following passage:—*Unto us a child is born, says the Prophet, &c the government shall be upon his shoulders.* If the child foretold by Isaiah was born, in his time, it can no longer be said, that the Prophet meant to speak of Christ, who was born several centuries after him—for the birth of Jesus being so distant could not be a sign of deliverance to A-haz, as his enemies pressed so closely upon him. Such

are the objections of unbelievers.—It is true, it is answered, that the prophets spoke of future events as if they were past or present. This answer requires only to be established by proof.—It is likewise added, that the birth of Isaiah's son was only a type of that of Christ; for to him, it is affirmed, is applicable "the government on the shoulder" which is here spoken of, and in which our Doctors perceive very distinctly pointed out the Cross that Jesus carried on his shoulders when going to Calvary. Thus our interpreters have the happiness of seeing the sign of dominion, or empire, in what would appear to eyes less enlightened the sign of punishment, weakness, and slavery.

It is proper also to observe how it comes to be said, that in the Christian system it is not at all necessary a prophecy have relation, in all its parts, to the subject or fact to which it is applied. The sacred writers do not mean to cite a whole prophecy, but only a passage, a detached phrase, or indeed often a single word apposite to the subject they treat of, without troubling themselves whether what precedes or what follows their quotation has connection or not with what they are speaking of. In the example under discussion, St Matthew, wishing to quote Isaiah, and apply a prophecy to Christ, takes of this prophecy these detached words only, *A virgin, or a young woman, shall conceive, &c.*—he stood in need of no more of it.—According to that Evangelist, the Virgin Mary had conceived:—Isaiah had said, that a girl, or woman, should conceive. He therefore immediately concluded, that the conception of Jesus was foretold by Isai-

ah. This vague connection is sufficient for St Matthew, and all Christians who, like him, believe that they see their founder pointed out in this prophecy.

Following this strange method, they have also advanced the authority of Isaiah to prove that Jesus was the Messiah promised to the Jews. In the 50th chapter this prophet describes, in a very pathetic manner, the misfortunes and sufferings of his brother Jeremiah. They have long laboured to apply that prophecy to Christ—they have distinctly seen him pointed out in the “man of sorrows” of whom Isaiah here speaks;—so that it is regarded rather as a faithful and circumstantial narrative of the passion of Jesus than as a prediction. But in fact, sound criticism must acknowledge, that this history relates only to Jeremiah. Not to deprive themselves, however, of the resources so useful a passage might furnish, they have decided, that in the case of prophecies the *indirect relation* should have place: By this means, in admitting that the narrative of Isaiah had Jeremiah for its object, they have laid it down as a principle that Jeremiah was a *figure* or *type* of Jesus. It is not that their lives have been strictly contemporaneous; but in the Christian religion, conformity followed by affinities is not absolutely requisite to the justice of the comparison.

This manner of reasoning, peculiar to the Christian religion, has been very convenient for it. St Paul especially, like most of the first preachers of Christianity, and after them the fathers and doctors of the church,

have successfully employed this rare method of proving their system. According to them, all under the ancient law was the image of the new, and the most celebrated personages under the Old Testament typified prophetically Jesus Christ and his church. Abel, assassinated by his brother, was a prophetic figure of Jesus, put to death by the Jews. The sacrifice of Isaac which was not accomplished, was the image of that accomplished on the cross. The relations or predictions which obviously had for their object Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Moses, Joshua, Samuel, David, Solomon, Jeremiah, Zorobabel, or other ancient personages, were applied to Christ—His death was represented by the blood of he goats and of bulls. In short, by aid of their allegories, all the ancient history of the Jews served only to announce the events in the life of Jesus, and the history of the establishment of his religion. — In this manner it is easy to find in the scriptures whatever one desires.

It would be useless here to investigate the famous prophecy of the seventy weeks of Daniel, in which the Christian doctors believe, they see the coming of Christ very clearly announced. It is true, that if Daniel or his editors had taken the trouble to specify the nature of these *weeks*, they would have prevented much trouble to interpreters: this prediction might then have been a very great resource to Christianity. The ablest critics, however, declare, that they are very much embarrassed, when attempting to fix the commencement and the end of these seventy weeks; on this they are never unanimous, nor can they agree on

a precise date, which hitherto is wanting to the great event of the coming of the Messiah. We know the Jews made use of weeks of days, weeks of weeks, and weeks of years. It is by a conjecture, merely hazarded, they advance in the Bible of Louvain, that the weeks mentioned in Daniel, are weeks of years. Yet that supposition throws light on nothing, for the chronological table, which the doctors of Louvain have published, gives us only three hundred and forty-three years, intervening between the time when they make the weeks to commence, and the death of Jesus. Many critics have believed, that this prediction had been added afterwards to the text of Daniel, in favour of Jonathan Maccabeus. We may judge of the little credit one can give to this prophecy of Daniel, from the prodigious number of commentaries that have been made on it. (4)

After this statement, and without dwelling longer on prophecies unintelligible even to those who adduce them as proofs, let us proceed to the life of Christ, and see if it is better adapted to confirm a Christian in his religion.

CHAPTER SECOND.

OF THE BIRTH OF JESUS CHRIST.

ALL the prophecies related in the sacred books, or spread abroad amongst the Jews, coincide in making them hope for the return of the favour of the Almighty. God had promised them a deliverer, a messenger, a *Messiah*, who should restore the power of Israel. That deliverer was to be of the seed of David, the prince *according to God's own heart*, so submissive to the priests, and so zealous for religion. It was, doubtless, to recompense the devotion and docility of this holy usurper, that the prophets and the priests, loaded with his kindness, promised him, in the name of heaven, that his family should reign for ever. If that famous prediction was belied afterwards, during the Babylonish captivity, and the subsequent period, the Jews at this time, no less credulous than their ancestors, rested in expectation, and persuaded themselves that it was impossible their prophets and diviners were able, or intended to deceive them. They imagined that their oracles, sooner or later, would be accomplished, and that they should see a descendant of David restore the honour of the nation.

It was to conform themselves to these predictions and popular notions, that the writers of the Gospels took care to give Christ a genealogy, by which they

pretended to prove, that he was descended in a direct line from David, and consequently, in virtue of his birth, had a right to arrogate the character of Messiah. Nevertheless, criticism has tired itself on this genealogy; such as are not possessed of faith have been surprised to find, that the Holy Ghost has dictated it differently to the two Evangelists who have detailed it: For, as has been so frequently remarked, the genealogy given by St Matthew is not the same with that of St Luke: a disparity which has thrown Christian interpreters into embarrassments from which all their subtilty has hitherto been unable to rescue them. They tell us, that one of these genealogies is that of Joseph; but supposing Joseph to be of the race of David, a Christian cannot believe that he was the real father of Jesus, because his religion enjoins him to believe steadfastly, that Christ is the Son of God. Again, supposing these two discordant genealogies to be Mary's, in that case the Holy Ghost has blundered in one of them, and unbelievers will always have reason to lament the want of exactness in the writers he has deigned to inspire. In whatever way we consider them, one of the genealogies in the Gospel will always appear faulty and incomplete, and the extraction of Jesus will be very weakly established. It was, however, a point that merited some attention, seeing, in so far as concerns the Jews, it was evidently on his illustrious birth that the Messiah was to found his claims.

Be that as it may, let us examine the particulars which preceded and accompanied the birth of Christ. One Evangelist alone has transmitted them to us; all

the others have superficially passed over circumstances as marvellous as they are important. St Matthew, content with his genealogy, speaks but in few words of the preternatural manner wherein Jesus was formed in the womb of his mother. The speech of an angel, seen in a dream, suffices to convince Joseph of the virtue of his wife, and he adopts her child without any hesitation. St Mark makes no mention of this memorable incident. St John, who, by the assistance of his mystic and Platonic theology, could embellish that fact, or rather confound it, so as to shelter himself from the attacks of criticism, has not said one word about it. We are, therefore, constrained to satisfy ourselves with the materials St Luke has left us.

According to this Evangelist, Elizabeth, kinswoman of Mary, and wife of a priest named Zacharias, (1) was in the sixth month of her pregnancy, "when the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city called Nazareth, to a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David, and the virgin's name was Mary. And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee; blessed art thou among women. And when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be. And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary; for thou hast found favour with God. And behold thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shall call his name Jesus.—Then said Mary to the angel, How shall this be, for I know not a man?

“ And the angel answered and said unto her, The
 “ Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power
 “ of the Highest shall overshadow thee ; therefore al-
 “ so that holy thing which shall be born of thee, shall
 “ be called the Son of God.—And Mary said, Be-
 “ hold the handmaid of the Lord ; be it unto me
 “ according to thy word. Thereafter the angel de-
 “ parted from her,” adds the text ;—and all this has
 nothing of the marvellous.

Nothing is more simple than this narrative ; if the
 least reflection is employed on it, the wonderful will
 vanish ; and we will find they have taken the greatest
 care to spare the modesty of the young persons who
 might read this relation. An angel enters the house †
 of Mary, whose husband was absent. He salutes her,
 that is, pays her a compliment in the language of the
 country, which translated according to the genius of
 ours, (the French) signifies, “ Good day, my dear
 “ Mary ! you are indeed adorable—What attractions !
 “ what graces ! of all women, you are the most love-
 “ ly in my eyes. Your charms are pledges to you of
 “ my sincerity. Crown then my passion. Fear not
 “ the consequences of your complaisance ; your hus-
 “ band is a simpleton ; by visions and dreams we can
 “ make him believe, whatever we desire. The good
 “ man will regard your pregnancy as the effect of a
 “ miracle of the Most High ; he will adopt your
 “ child with joy, and all will go on in the best man-
 “ ner possible.” Mary, charmed with these words,
 and little accustomed to receive the like compliments
 from her husband, replied, “ Well !—I yield—I re-

“ly on your word and address; do with me as you please.”

Nothing is more easy than to disengage the relation of St Luke from the marvellous. The event of Mary's pregnancy follows in the order of nature, and if we substitute a young man in the place of the angel, the passage of the Evangelist will have nothing incredible in it. (2) In fact, many have thought that the angel Gabriel was no other than a gallant, who, profiting by the absence of Joseph, found the secret to declare and gratify his passion.

We will not stop to form conjectures on the true name and station of Mary's lover. The Jews, whose testimony on this subject may appear suspicious, assert, as we will afterwards relate, that this favourite lover was a soldier;—*the military have always claims on the hearts of the ladies*. They add, that from his commerce with the wife of Joseph, the Messiah of the Christians sprung; that the discontented husband left his faithless wife, in order to retire to Babylon, and that Jesus with his mother went to Egypt, where he learned the trade of a conjurer, and afterwards returned to practice in Judea. (3)

Whether these histories, or, if they will, Rabbinical fables, be true or false, it is certain that the narrative of St Luke, if not stripped of the marvellous, will always present unsurmountable difficulties to the minds of the incredulous. They will ask, How God, being a pure spirit, could *overshadow a woman*, and

excite in her all the movements necessary to the production of a child? They will ask, How the divine nature could unite with the nature of a woman? They will maintain, that the narrative is unworthy of the power and majesty of the Supreme Being, who did not stand in need of employing means as ridiculous as indecent, to operate the salvation of mankind. It will be thought, that the Almighty should have employed other means for conveying Jesus into the womb of his mother; he might have made him appear on earth without needing to be incarnate in the belly of a woman; (4) but there must be wonders in romances, and especially in religions. It was in all ages supposed that great men were born in an extraordinary manner. Among the Heathens, Minerva sprung out of the brain of Jupiter; Bacchus was preserved in the thigh of the same god. Among the Chinese, the god Fo was generated by a virgin, rendered prolific by a ray of the sun. With Christians, Jesus is born of a virgin, impregnated by the operation of the Holy Ghost, and she remains a virgin after that operation. Incapable of elevating themselves to God, men have made him descend to their own nature; such is the origin of all *incarnations*, the belief of which is spread throughout the world.

All the wonders, however, which precede the birth of Jesus are terminated by a very natural occurrence. At the end of nine months his mother is delivered, like all other women; and after so many incredible and supernatural events, the Son of God comes into the world like all other people's children. This

conformity in birth will ever occasion the surmise of a conformity in the physical causes which produced the son of Mary. Indeed, the supernatural only can produce the supernatural ; — from material agents result physical effects ; and they maintain in the schools, that there must always be a parity of nature between cause and effect.

Altho' according to Christians, Jesus was at one and the same time man and God, persons hard of belief will say, it was necessary, that the divine germ brought from heaven to be deposited in the womb of Mary should contain at the same time both divinity and body, to become Son of God. In a word to use the language of Theologists, the *hypostatic union* of the two natures in Christ must have taken place before his birth, and immixed in the womb of his mother. In that case we cannot conceive, how it could happen, that the divine nature should continue torpid and inactive during the whole time of Mary's pregnancy, in so much that she herself had not even been warned of the time of her in-lying. The proof of this we find in St Luke, chap. ii. " In those days," says he, " there went out a decree from Cæsar Augustus that all the world should be taxed." — And as all went to be taxed, " every one out of his own city, Joseph also went out of Nazareth — — — and came to Bethlehem, to be taxed with Mary, who was with child ; and so it was, that while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered, and she brought forth her first-born son, and wrapt him in

"swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn."

This narrative proves that Mary was taken unprovided, and that the Holy Ghost, who had done so many things for her, had neglected to warn her of an event, so likely to interest him, and so important to all mankind. The humanity of Jesus being subject to every casualty, in our nature, might have perished in this journey, undertaken at a time very critical to his mother. In fine, we do not understand, how the mother could remain in complete ignorance of the proximity of her time, and how the Eternal could so abandon the precious child he had deposited in her womb.

Some other circumstances of the relation of St Luke present new difficulties. He speaks of a *taxing* (enumeration) by order of Cæsar Augustus, a fact of which no mention is made by any historian, Jewish or profane. (5)

We are also astonished to find the son of God born in poverty, having no other asylum than a stable, and no other cradle than a manger; in short, at the tenderest age and in a rigorous season, exposed to miseries without number.

It is true our Theologists have found a way to answer all these difficulties. They maintain, that a just God, wishing to appease himself, destined from the beginning his innocent son to afflictions, in order to have a motive for pardoning the guilty human race, which

had become hateful to him through Adam's transgression, in which however his descendants had no share. By an act of justice whereof the mind of man can form no idea, a God, whose essence renders him incapable of committing sin, is loaded with the iniquities of man, and must expiate them in order to disarm the indignation of a father he has not offended. Such are the inconceivable principles which serve for the basis of Christian theology.

Our doctors add, — It was the will of God that the birth of his Son should be accompanied with the same accidents as that of other men, in the view of consoling the latter for the misfortunes attendant on their existence. — Man, say they, is guilty before he is born, — because all children are bound to pay the debts of their fathers : — Thus man suffers justly as a sinner himself, and as charged with the sin of his first father. Granting this, — what more consolatory to us than seeing a God, innocence and holiness itself, suffering in a stable all the evils attached to indigence ! That consolation would doubtless have been wanting to men, if God had ordained that his Son should be born in splendour, and an abundance of the comforts of life — In short, if the innocent Jesus had not suffered, mankind, incapable of extinguishing a debt contracted by Adam, would have been for ever excluded from paradise.

As to the painful journey, Mary was obliged to undertake in such critical circumstances, this occurrence had been foreseen by eternal wisdom, which had re-

solved, that Christ should be born at Bethlehem, and not at Nazareth. It was necessary—having been foretold, it behoved to be accomplished.

However solid these answers may appear to all who have received a sufficient dose of faith, they are not capable of convincing the incredulous. Unbelievers exclaim against the injustice of making a most innocent God suffer, and loading him with the iniquities of the earth : — No more can they conceive, by what principles of equity the Supreme Being could make the human race responsible for a fault committed by their first parents without their knowledge and participation. They maintain, that, in fair justice, children have a right to renounce the succession of their parents, when they have to pay out of the estate debts which the latter have contracted. In a word,—the incredulous remark that the conduct attributed to God by the Christian theology is injurious to him, in so far as it represents him as the most implacable, the most cruel, and the most unjust of tyrants. Finally, they remark, that it would have been wiser to have hindered man from committing sin than to permit him to sin, and make his own Son die to expiate man's iniquity.

With respect to the journey to Bethlehem, one cannot divine the necessity of it. The place where the Saviour of the world was to be born seems a circumstance perfectly indifferent to the salvation of mankind. As for the prophecy announcing the glory of Bethlehem in having given existence to the " Leader

"of Israel,"— it does not appear to agree with Jesus who was born there in a stable, and who was rejected by the people whose leader he was to be. It is only a pious straining that can make this prediction apply to Christ. We are indeed assured, that it had been foretold, Jesus was to be born in poverty; and, on the other hand the Messiah of the Jews is generally announced by the prophets as a prince, a hero, and a conqueror. It is necessary then to know which of these prophecies we ought to keep by. Our doctors will not forget to tell us, the predictions announcing that Jesus would be born and live in indigence and meanness, ought to be taken literally, and those which announce his power and glory ought to be taken allegorically. But this solution will not satisfy the incredulous, they will affirm that employing this manner of explanation one will always find in the scripture and divine oracles, whatever he may think he stands in need of. They will conclude, that the scripture is to Christians what the clouds are to the man, who imagines he perceives in them whatever figures he pleases. (6)

CHAPTER THIRD.

ADORATION OF THE MAGI AND SHEPHERDS,---MASSACRE OF THE
INNOCENTS;---AND OTHER CIRCUMSTANCES,
WHICH FOLLOWED THE BIRTH OF
JESUS CHRIST.

OF the four historians of Jesus adopted by the church, two are wholly silent on the facts we are to relate in this chapter; besides St Matthew and St Luke who have transmitted them to us, are not at all unanimous in particulars. The ablest commentators do not know how to reconcile them, so discordant are their relations. These differences, it is true, are less sensible, when the Evangelists are read the one after the other, or without reflection; but they become particularly striking, when one employs his memory, or takes the trouble of comparing them. This is, undoubtedly, the reason why they have hitherto been unable to make a concordance of the gospels, which could have the general approbation of the church; even the concordances, of which they have allowed the printing, have not been universally adopted, altho' it must be acknowledged that they contain nothing contrary to faith. It is perhaps from judicious policy that the heads of the church have not approved of any system on this point; they have probably felt the

impossibility of reconciling narratives so discordant as those of the four Evangelists; for the Holy Ghost, doubtless with a view to exercise the faith of the faithful, has inspired them very differently. Besides, an able concordance of the Gospels would prove a very dangerous work;—it would necessarily bring together facts related by authors, who, very far from supporting, would only reciprocally weaken each other—a circumstance which could not fail to stagger at least the faith of the compiler.

St Matthew, who, according to common opinion, wrote the first history of Jesus, assures us, that as soon as Christ was born, and while he was still in the stable at Bethlehem, Magi came from the east to Jerusalem, and enquired where the king of the Jews was, whose star † they had observed in their own country. Herod, who then reigned in Judea, being informed of the motive of their journey, consulted the people of the law; and having learned that Christ was to be born at Bethlehem, he permitted the Magi to go there, recommending to them to inform themselves exactly of this child, that he himself might do him homage. (1)

It appears, from the narrative of St Matthew, that as soon as the Magi left Herod, they took the road to Bethlehem, a place not far from Jerusalem. It is surprising that this prince, alarmed at the arrival of the Magi, who had thus announced the birth of a

(1) St Matthew ii. 2. &c.

king of the Jews, did not take more precaution to allay his own uneasiness and that of the capital, which the Gospel represents as in a state of consternation at this grand event. It would have been very easy for him to have satisfied himself of the fact, without being under the necessity of relying on strangers, who did not execute his commission. The Magi do not return; Joseph has time to save himself by flight, with his little family; Herod remains tranquil, in spite of his suspicions and fears. It is not till after an interval, little probable, that he flies into a passion on finding himself deceived, and then, to preserve his crown in safety, he orders a general massacre of the children of Bethlehem, and the neighbouring villages. Why suppose such conduct in a sovereign jealous, distrustful, and cruel? This prince had assembled the doctors of the law and principal men of the nation; their advice had confirmed the rumour spread by the Magi; they said, it was at Bethlehem that Christ was to be born, and yet Herod does nothing for his own tranquillity! Either Herod had faith in the prophecies of the Jews, or he did not believe them. In the first case, instead of relying on strangers, he ought himself to have gone, with all his court, to Bethlehem, and paid homage to the Saviour of the nation. In the second case, it is absurd to make Herod order a general massacre of infants, on account of a suspicion founded on a prophecy which he did not believe.

Be that as it may, this prince did not put himself in a passion, till after the lapse of several days, and after he perceived that the Magi derided him, and

had returned by another road. † But why did he not learn by the same means the flight of Jesus, accompanied with Joseph and his mother? Their retreat must certainly have been remarked in a place so small as Bethlehem. It will be said, perhaps, that on this occasion God permitted Herod to be blinded; but God should not have permitted the inhabitants of Bethlehem and its environs, to be so obstinate in preserving a secret, that was to cost the lives of all their children: With the power of doing miracles, could not God have saved his Son by more gentle means, than the useless massacre of a great number of innocents?

On the other hand, Herod was not absolute master in Judea; the Romans would not have permitted him to exercise such cruelties; and the Jewish nation, persuaded of the birth of Christ, would not have been accessory to them. A king of France, more absolute than a petty sovereign of Judea dependent on the Romans, would not be obeyed, were he to order his Swiss guards to go and cut the throats of all the children of Surene or St Cloud, because three strangers, in passing through Versailles, had said to him, that among the infants born in these villages, there was one who, according to the rules of judicial astrology, was destined to be one day king of France. At the time when astrology was in vogue, they would have contented themselves with causing search to be made for the suspected infant; they would have kept it in solitary confinement, or perhaps put it to death, but without comprehending other innocent children in its proscription,

We might indeed oppose to the relation of St Matthew, the silence of the other Evangelists, and especially that of the historian Josephus, who having reasons to hate Herod, would not have failed to relate a fact likely to render him odious, as the massacre of the innocents. Philo is likewise silent on this action of Herod : and no reason can be divined, why these two celebrated historians should agree in concealing a fact so horrible. We cannot suppose that it has proceeded from hatred to the Christian religion, for that detached fact proves neither for nor against it. We may therefore conclude, that this massacre is a fable, which besides does in no respect agree with the details of the life of Jesus transmitted by the other Evangelists. St Matthew seems to have invented this tale, merely to have the opportunity of applying an ancient prophecy, *which was his predominant taste*. But in this instance he has obviously deceived himself. The prophecy, which this evangelist implies to the massacre of the innocents, is taken from Jeremiah. All the Jews understood it as relating to the Babylonish captivity. It is conceived in these words in the Hebrew : “ The Lord hath said, the voice of lamentations, groanings and bitter tears, has been heard from on high of Rachel, who weeped for her children, and refused to be comforted for them because they were not.” (2)—The verse which follows, is so plain, that it is inconceivable why St Matthew has ventured to apply it to the pretended massacre at Bethlehem.—“ Thus saith the Lord,” continues Jeremiah, “ refrain thy voice from weeping and thine eyes from tears : for thy work shall be rewarded, and thy children shall

(2) Jerem. xxxi. 15.

"come again from the land of the enemy." Their return from the captivity is here clearly pointed out. There is no mention made of Ramah, † which the evangelist speaks of, but of the mountains of Samaria, where the Israelites should again plant vines, after returning to their own country.

It is, however, to accomplish a prophecy, that the same St Matthew makes Jesus travel into Egypt. This journey according to him, or rather Christ's return, had been predicted by Hoseah, in these words: "out of Egypt have I called my son;" but it is evident, that this passage is to be considered, only as relating to the deliverance of the Israelites from Egyptian bondage thro' the ministry of Moses.

Besides the journey and abode of Jesus in Egypt do not agree in any manner with some circumstances which happened in the infancy of Christ, as related by St Luke, who informs us, that at the end of eight days Christ was circumcised. (3) The time of Mary's purification being accomplished according to the law of Moses, Joseph and his mother carried Jesus to Jerusalem in order to present him to the Lord, agreeably to the law, which ordained the consecrating to him the first born (first-fruits); and offering a sacrifice for them. The same St Luke informs us, on this occasion old Simeon took the infant in his arms, and declared in presence of all the people assisting at the ceremony, that the child was the Saviour of Israel. An old prophetess called Anna, bore aloud the same testimony in his favour, and spoke of him to all those who *sought*

for the redemption of Israel. (4) But why were speeches, thus publicly made in the temple of Jerusalem, in which city Herod resided, unknown to a prince so suspicious? They were much better calculated to excite his uneasiness, and awake his jealousy, than the arrival of astrologers from the east.

Did Joseph and Mary, who had come to Jerusalem for the presentation of Jesus and purification of his mother, return to Bethlehem; and went they from thence into Egypt, in place of going to Nazareth?—St Luke indeed says most expressly, that when they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee to their own city Nazareth. (5) But in what time did the parents of Jesus accomplish all that the law ordained? Was it before going into Egypt, or after their return from that country, where, according to St Matthew, they had taken refuge to shelter themselves from the cruelty of Herod?—In a word, Did the purification of the virgin, and the presentation of her son in the temple, take place before or after the death of that wicked prince?—According to Leviticus, the purification of a mother who had brought a son into the world was to be made at the end of thirty days. Hence we see, how very difficult it is to reconcile the flight into Egypt and the massacre of the innocents which St Matthew relates, with the narrative of St Luke, who says, that “after having performed the ordinances of the law, Joseph and Mary returned into Galilee, to their own city Nazareth;” and then adds, that they “went to Jerusalem every year to celebrate the Pass-

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(4) St Luke, ii. 25. &c.

"over."— If we would adopt the relation of the two Evangelists, At what time will they place the coming of the Magi from the east in order to adore Christ, the anger of Herod, the flight into Egypt, and the massacre of the innocents?— We are then forced to conclude, either that the relation of St Luke is defective, or that St Matthew wanted to deceive his readers with improbable tales. Whichever side we take, the Holy Ghost, who inspired both, will in either case be found to have committed a mistake.

There is another fact on which our two Evangelists do not better agree. St Matthew, as we have seen, makes Magi, or persons of consequence come to Bethlehem from the extremity of the east, to adore the child Jesus, and offer him presents. St Luke, less taken with the marvellous, makes this child be adored by simple shepherds, who watched their flocks during night, and to whom an angel announced the great event of the birth of the Saviour of Israel. The latter evangelist speaks neither of the apparition of the star, nor of the coming of the Magi, nor of the cruelty of Herod; circumstances however worthy of being recorded by St Luke, who acquaints us, that he was so exactly informed of every thing concerning Jesus.

However that may be, the parents of Christ, either after their return from Egypt according to St Matthew, or after his presentation in the temple according to St Luke, went to reside at Nazareth. The first of these writers, *as usual*, perceives in this the accomplishment of the prediction, *he shall be called a Naza-*

rene. Unfortunately, it is not known where to find this prophecy in the Bible; nor can it be divined, by whom it was uttered. It is however certain, that Nazarene, among the Jews, signified a *vagabond*, a man excluded from the rest of the world; that Nazareth was a very pitiful town, inhabited by beings so wretched, that their poverty had become proverbial; and that they called *Nazarenes*, beggars, vagrants, and people whom nobody would own. (6)

We have seen, in the course of this chapter, how little harmony exists between the two evangelists, in the manner they relate the circumstances with which the birth of Jesus was accompanied. Let us now examine, what could have been the views of these two writers in relating so differently the facts they meant to communicate.

It is, at least, impossible, that Jesus, as St Luke relates, could constantly reside at Nazareth until he was twelve years of age, if it be true that he was carried soon after his birth into Egypt, where St Matthew makes him remain until the death of Herod. It is proper to observe, that even in the time Jesus lived, they upbraided him with his stay in Egypt; (7) his enemies averred, that he had there learned magic, to which they attributed the wonders or cunning tricks they saw him perform. It appears, that St Luke, to do away these accusations, has thought proper to pass over in silence the journey into Egypt, which rendered his hero suspected. He fixes him, therefore, at Nazareth, and makes him go every year with his parents

to Jerusalem. But the precaution of that evangelist seems to have been useless. St Matthew, who wrote before him, had established the opinion of the journey and abode of Jesus in Egypt. Origen in his dispute with Celsus, does not deny it; hence we see, that the Christian doctors did not doubt, but Jesus had been in that country, in spite of the silence of St Matthew.—Let us endeavour then to develop the motives of these two writers.

The Jews in general agreed in the expectation of a Messiah or deliverer: but as the different orders of the state had their prophets, they possessed also diverse signs, whereby they were to know the Messiah. The great, the rich, and persons well informed and in the better sphere of life, did not surely suspect, that the deliverer of Israel should be born in a stable, and sprung from the dregs of the people. They undoubtedly expected their deliverance by a prince, a warrior, a man of power able to make himself respected by the nations inimical to Judea, and to break in pieces their chains. The poor on the contrary, who, as well as the great and the rich, have their portion of self-love, thought they might flatter themselves, that the Messiah would be born in their class. Their nation and their neighbours furnished enough examples of great men sprung from the bosom of poverty. Moreover, the oracles, with which they fed this nation, were of such a nature that it every family believed itself entitled to aspire to the honour of giving a Messiah, altho' the most general opinion was, that this deliverer was to come of the race of David.

Admitting this, shepherds and people of the lowest order might readily believe, that a woman delivered in a stable at Bethlehem had brought the Christ into the world. It may likewise be presumed, that Mary, with a view to render herself interesting said to those who visited her, that she was descended from the blood of kings; a *mobile*, doubtless, well adapted to excite the commiseration and wonderment of the people. This secret, and the confused remembrance of some prophecies about Bethlehem the native country of David, were sufficient to operate on the imaginations of these credulous folks, little scrupulous about proofs of what was told them.

St. Matthew, as it appears from his history, had his head full of prophecies and popular notions, as he at least reckoned on the credulity of his readers. In composing his romance, to fill up a blank of thirty years in the life of Jesus, he contrives to make him travel into Egypt, without foreseeing the objections that might be made on account of the neglect of the holy family to fulfil the ordinances of the law,—such as the circumcision of the child, his presentation in the temple, the purification of his mother, and the celebration of the Passover,—ceremonies which could only be performed at Jerusalem. Perhaps it is to justify that journey and those negligences, St. Matthew introduces the prophecy of Hoseah relative to the return from Egypt, which we have already mentioned. It is perhaps also to justify the duration of Jesus's abode in Egypt, he relates the wrath of Herod and the fable of the massacre of the innocents,† which he

makes that prince order, whom his crimes had in other respects rendered very odious to the Jews as well as to strangers. One is disposed to believe every thing of a man become famous for his wickedness.

St Luke, to elude, as we have seen, the reproaches, which in his time might be thrown on Jesus on account of his journey and residence in Egypt, has not mentioned it at all, but his silence does not destroy its reality. It was necessary to free Christ from the suspicion of magic, but he has not cleared him of accusations quite as weighty, brought against his birth.

Celsus, a celebrated physician, who lived in the second century of Christianity, and who had carefully collected all which had been published against Christ, asserts that he was the fruit of an adultery. Origen, in his work against Celsus, has preserved this accusation, but has not transmitted to us the proofs whereon it was founded. Unbelievers, however, have endeavoured to supply them, and found the opinion of Celsus on what follows:

1st, From the testimony of St Matthew himself it appears most certain, that Joseph, spouse of Mary, was very much dissatisfied with the pregnancy of his wife, in which he knew he had no part. He formed the design of quitting her secretly and without noise, a resolution from which he was diverted by an angel, or, if they will, by a dream, or perhaps by reflection, which among Jews passes always for the effect of an inspiration from on high. It appears, however, this

design of Joseph had transpired, the fact had been divulged, and they formed of it a reproach against Jesus. But St Luke more prudent than St Matthew, has not ventured to make mention either of the ill humour of Joseph, or of the good-natured conduct he followed. Moreover, tho' Joseph had formed this resolution as to his wife's amour, we do not find him appearing again on the stage from the time that Jesus enters on it. Altho' we are no where informed of the death of this easy man, it is to be presumed that he never beheld with a kind eye his putative son, and that he abandoned a child, to whose birth he knew that he had noways contributed. (8)

When at thirty years of age Jesus and his mother went to the wedding at Cana, there is no mention of Joseph. If we admit, with St Luke, the history of Jesus' dispute with the doctors in the temple of Jerusalem, we will find a new proof of the indifference which reigned between the pretended father and putative son: they meet again at the end of three days, and deign not to interchange a word.

2dly, If to these presumptions are joined testimonies more positive and of high antiquity, which confirm the suspicions entertained concerning the birth of Jesus, we will obtain proof, that must convince every unprejudiced person. The emperor Julian, as well as Celsus, who both had carefully examined all the writings existing in their time for and against the Christian religion and its author, represent the mother of Jesus as a prostitute, living by her debaucheries, and turned off by

her betrothed.—From the beginning of Christianity, the sect of Antidicomarites regarded Jesus as a bastard child. In the works of the Jews, he is treated as an *adulterous child*. In short, almost in our days, Helvidius, a learned protestant critic, as well as several others, has maintained, not only that Jesus was the fruit of a criminal amour, but also that Mary, repudiated by Joseph, had other children by different husbands.

Be that as it may, it appears, Mary did not want a reason for forsaking Joseph, and flying into Egypt with her son. A constant tradition among the Jews assures us, that she made this journey to shelter herself from the pursuit of her spouse, who might have delivered her up to the rigour of the laws, in spite of the nocturnal visions, which had been employed to pacify him; we know, that the Hebrews did not understand jesting on this subject.

We also find in the *Talmud* the name of *Panther*, surnamed *Bar-Panther*, whom they reckon in the number of the gallants or husbands of the virgin. From thence it would result, if the fact be true, that Mary, repudiated by Joseph, or after her flight, espoused Panther an Egyptian soldier, her favourite lover, and the real father of Jesus. St John Damascene thought to repair the injury, which this anecdote might do to Mary's reputation, by saying, that the surname of *Panther*, or *Bar-panther*, was hereditary in the family of Mary, and consequently in that of Joseph. (9) But *1st*, either Mary was not the kinswoman of Joseph, or she was not the cousin of E-

(9) St Joan. Damascen. *De fide orthodox.* lib. iv. c. 15.

Elizabeth, who was married to a priest, and therefore of the tribe of Levi.—*2dly*, We no where find in the Bible the name of *Panther* among the descendants of David. If this had been a hereditary surname in that family, it would be found somewhere, unless we suppose, that John Damascene has learned it by a particular revelation. *3dly*, The name of *Panther* is, by no means, Hebrew.

It will perhaps be told us, that these rumours, so injurious to Jesus and his mother, are calumnies invented by the enemies of the Christian religion.—But why decide, if the pleas of both parties are not investigated? Farther, these imputations are very ancient; they have been advanced against Christians since the origin of their religion; and they have never satisfactorily refuted them. In the time of Jesus himself, we find, that his contemporaries regarded his wonders as the effects of magic, the delusions of the devil, the consequences of the power of Beelzebub, or flight-of-hand tricks. In particular, the relations of Jesus were of that opinion, and regarded him as an impostor—a circumstance stated in the Gospel itself, where we will find afterwards that they wanted to arrest him.

On the other hand, Jesus himself never speaks of his infancy, or of the time that had preceded his preaching. There is every reason to believe, he did not love to recur to circumstances dishonourable to his mother; towards whom indeed we will very soon find him failing in filial respect.

The eyangelists in like manner pass very slightly over the first years of their hero's life. St Matthew makes him return from Egypt "at that time," without fixing any æra. † He thus leaves his commentators in the embarrassment of learning whether Jesus was then two or ten years old. We find indeed, that the term of ten years is, thro' complaisance, invented on account of the dispute between him and the Doctors of Jerusalem, which St Luke places at his twelfth year. This excepted, Jesus disappears from the scene, not to shew himself again till thirty years of age. (10)

It is difficult to discover what he did until that age. If we credit St Luke, he remained at Nazareth. Yet there is reason to believe that he was somewhere else, for the purpose of learning the part which he was afterwards to play. In fact, if he had always resided at Nazareth, the inhabitants of that small town would have known him perfectly. Very far from this; — they are surprised at seeing him, when thirty years of age—They only conjecture that they knew him; and ask each other, "Is not this the son of Joseph?" (11) —a question very ridiculous in the mouth of persons who must have been in the constant habit of seeing Jesus in the narrow compass of their town.— This does not hinder St Justin from telling us, that he became a carpenter in the work-shop of his pretended father, and that he wrought at buildings or instruments of husbandry. (12) But such a profession could

(11) St Luke iv. 22.

not long agree with a man in whom we find an ambitious and restless mind.

It will be better, therefore, to quit here St Luke, in order to follow St Matthew, who places the baptism of John after the return from Egypt, and makes Jesus forthwith commence his mission. It is also, to speak properly, at this epoch we ought to begin the life of Christ. Yet to let nothing be lost to the reader of the evangelical memoirs, the subject of our literary labours, we thought it our duty not to pass over in silence the circumstances which have been related; as these preliminaries are calculated to throw much light on the person and actions of our hero. Besides, the interval between the birth and preaching of Jesus has not been the part of his history left exposed to the shafts of criticism; and one cannot enough admire, how much it has influenced the conduct of the evangelists. St Matthew, as we have seen, to account for his master's absence during the thirty years, makes him go into Egypt, and return in an unlimited time. St Luke, who digested his memoirs after Matthew, perceiving that the abode in Egypt cast a suspicion of magic on the miracles of Jesus, makes him remain in Galilee, going and coming every year to Jerusalem; and fixes, as he believes, his abode in the country, by making him appear, at the age of twelve, in the capital, in the midst of the Doctors, and debating with them. But St Mark and St John, profiting, perhaps, by the criticism which these different arrangements had experienced, make the Messiah drop from the

clouds, and put him instantly to labour at the great work of the salvation of mankind.

It is thus that, on combining and comparing the several relations, we are enabled to discover the true system of the Gospels, in which, without adopting any alterations, we will find materials for composing the life of Jesus, by merely reducing the marvellous to its proper value.

 CHAPTER FOURTH.

BAPTISM OF JESUS CHRIST --- HIS ABODE IN THE DESERT ---
 COMMENCEMENT OF HIS PREACHING & MIRACLES---
 MARRIAGE AT CANA.

FROM the time the Romans subdued Judea, the superstitious inhabitants of that country, impatient to see the Messiah or deliverer, so often promised to their fathers, arrive, seemed inclined to quicken the slowness of the Eternal by the ardour of their desires. This disposition of mind gave birth to impostures, revolts and disturbances, the authors of which the Roman power punished in such a manner as to discourage their adherents, or at least quickly disperse them. Down to the era we are about to speak of (which the gospel of St Luke, fixes at the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius,) none of those who had attempted to pass for the Messiah had been able to succeed. To have acted well that part, there was need of forces more considerable than those which all Judea could oppose to the conquerors of the world. It was therefore necessary, to have recourse to craft, and to employ delusions and trick in place of force. For this purpose it was of importance to be well acquainted with the disposition of the Jewish nation; to affect a great respect for its laws and usages, for which it entertained the most profound veneration; to profit

ingeniously by the predictions with which they were imbued ; to move the passions, and warm the imaginations of the fanatical and credulous people. But all this behoved to be silently affected ; it was necessary to avoid rendering himself suspected by the Romans ; it was necessary to be on his guard against the priests, doctors and persons of education, capable of penetrating and thwarting his designs. It was therefore essential to commence with gaining adherents and co-operators, and thereafter a party among the people, to support him against the *grandeess* of the nation. Policy required to shew himself rarely in the capital, to preach in the country, and render odious to the populace priests who devoured the nation, *grandeess* who oppressed it, and rich people of whom it ought to be naturally jealous. Not to alarm minds too much, prudence demanded that he should speak in ambiguous language and parables. In short, he could not dispense with working miracles, which, much more than all the harangues in the world, were at all times calculated to seduce ignorant devotees, disposed to see the finger of God in every act, the true causes of which they were unable to develope.

Such was, as we will see, the conduct of the personage whose life we examine. Whether we suppose, that he had been in Egypt for the purpose of acquiring there the talents necessary to his views, or that he had always resided at Nazareth, Jesus was not ignorant of the dispositions of his countrymen. As he knew how much predictions were indispensibly requisite to work upon the minds of the Jews, he made choice of a prophet and a forerunner in the person of his cousin

John Baptiſt. The latter, probably in concert with Jeſus, preached repentance, baptiſed on the banks of the Jordan, and announced the coming of a perſonage greater than himſelf. He ſaid to thoſe who gave ear to him, "I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance : but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, the latchet of whoſe ſhoe I am not worthy to looſe : he ſhall baptize you with the Holy Ghoſt and with fire." (1)

Jeſus accordingly repaired to John on purpoſe to concert matters with him, or, if they will, to receive baptiſm from his hands. The latter, according to the report of St Matthew, made at firſt ſome difficulty, affirming, that ſo far from being worthy to baptiſe Jeſus, it was from him, on the contrary, that he himſelf ought to receive baptiſm. At laſt however he yielded to the orders or inſtances of Chriſt, and adminiſtered to him that ſacrament of which the innocent ſon of God could not ſtand in great need. (2)

There is reaſon to believe, that in this interview the two kiſmen agreed upon their tranſactions, and took the neceſſary meaſures for making their deſigns ſucceed. The two preachers, who both had ambition, ſhared the miſſion between them. St John yielded the firſt character to Jeſus, whom he judged better qualified to play it with ſucceſs, and contented himſelf with being his *precurſor*, preaching in the deſart, beating up for followers, and preparing the ways

(1) St Matt. iii. 11. St Luke iii. 16.

for him,—all in consequence of a prophecy of Isaiah, who had said, “Prepare ye the way of the Lord, “make straight in the desert a highway for our God” [—an obscure and vague prediction, in which however, they believe they see clearly designed the Messiah and his holy precursor. (3)

The arrangements being once settled by our two missionaries, John took care to tell those who came to hear him, that to pacify Heaven it was time to repent, and that the arrival of the Messiah was not far off: In short, he declared in plain terms that he had seen him. The sermons of John having made considerable noise, the priests of Jerusalem, vigilant as to what might interest religion, wished to be informed of his views, and acquainted with his person. They dispatched emissaries after him; these men put some questions to him, and asked, if he was the Christ, or Elias, or a prophet (4). John answered, that he was none of all these. But when it was asked him, by what authority he baptized and preached, he declared, that he was the forerunner of the Messiah. This proceeding of the priests could only tend to give greater weight to John's assertions, and naturally behoved to excite the curiosity of the people assembled to hear him. The next day they went in a crowd to the place where the preacher baptized, when, profiting skilfully by the circumstance, and perceiving Jesus approaching, he exclaimed, “Behold the Lamb of God; which taketh away the sin of the world.—

(3) Isaiah xl. 3.

"This is he of whom I said, after me cometh a man,
"which is preferred before me." (5)

It is proper to observe, that the author of the gospel ascribed to John, remarking that it was important to remove the suspicion of collusion between Jesus and his forerunner, makes the Baptist declare twice that *he knew him not*, before baptizing him; but that it had been revealed to him by the Deity, that the person, on whom he should see the Holy Ghost descending during his baptism, was the Son of God. From thence one sees, that according to this evangelist, John did not know Jesus, who was however his kinsman, according to St Luke.

John was much esteemed by the people, whom a kind of austere and extraordinary life has always the power of seducing. They did not suspect that a missionary, so detached from the things of this world, could ever deceive them. They believed on his word, that the Holy Ghost, under the form of a dove, had descended on Jesus, and that he was the Christ or Messiah promised by the prophets.

On another occasion we will also find John-Baptist affecting not to know his cousin Jesus Christ: he deputed to him some of his disciples to learn *who he is?* Jesus replies, that they have only to relate to John the miracles he operates, and by that sign their mas-

ter would recognise him. We will have occasion afterwards to speak of this embassy. (6)

On his part, Jesus had associated with himself a disciple or confidant then called Simon, and afterwards *Cephas* or *Peter*, who had been the disciple of John. Scarcely had Simon taken his arrangements with the Messiah, when he drew over his brother *Andrew* † to the new sect. These two brothers were fishermen. One readily presumes, that our hero would not choose his followers among the grandees of the country.

The progress of John-Baptist, and the attachment of the people to him, alarmed the priests; they complained loudly, and John was arrested by order of the tetrarch Herod, who according to St Matthew, made him be beheaded, through complaisance to Herodias his sister-in-law. Yet we do not find the historians of this prince reproaching him with the punishment of the forerunner. After John's death, it appears that his disciples attached themselves to Christ, whose coming John had announced, and who in his turn had rendered in behalf of John the most public testimonies in presence of the people: for Jesus had openly declared, that John was *greater than a prophet, and greater than an angel, and that he was not born of woman who was greater than him* †.

Nevertheless, the Messiah, dreading to be involved

(6) See Chap. XI. of this work

in the affair of his forerunner, left his two disciples at Jerusalem, and withdrew into the desert, where he staid forty days. It has been remarked, that during the imprisonment of John, Christ did not think of delivering him; he performed no miracle in his behalf; after his death he spoke but very little of him, and forbore pronouncing his eulogy. He had no more need of him, and perhaps he wished by this conduct to give a lesson to those who serve the views of the ambitious, only in a secondary capacity, and teach them that they ought not to reckon too much on gratitude.

It would have been a bad exordium to assign fear as the motive of the Messiah's retreat. The gospel informs us that he was *carried up by the Spirit*, which transported him to the desert. It was necessary that Christ should surpass his forerunner. The latter had led a very austere life, his only nourishment being wild honey and locusts; but the gospel affirms, that Jesus eat *nothing at all* during his retreat, and that on the last day, having *felt himself hungry*, angels came and ministered to him.

Moreover, to evince the importance of his mission, the prejudice which it was to occasion to the empire of the devil, and the infinite advantages which were to result from it to his followers, Jesus on his return pretended, that the devil had tempted him, made the most flattering offers on purpose to engage him to desist from his enterprise, and profered him the monarchy of the universe, if he would renounce his project

of redeeming the human race. The refusal he gave, as to these propositions, evinced a supernatural desire to labour for the salvation of the world. Such as heard these details must have been filled with astonishment, penetrated with gratitude, and burning with zeal for the preacher; of consequence, the number of his adherents increased.

St John the evangelist, or the person who has written under his name, whose object appears particularly to have been to establish the divinity of Jesus, has not mentioned his carrying away, abode in the desert, and temptation. These transactions must have been reckoned by him prejudicial to the doctrine he wanted to introduce. St Matthew, St Mark, and St Luke relate the carrying away, and temptations which ensued, in a different manner, but calculated to shew the power of Satan over the Messiah. In fact, he transports him, no doubt in spite of him, to the pinnacle of the temple, and by an astonishing miracle makes Jesus contemplate from the summit of a mountain all the kingdoms of the universe, without even excepting those whose inhabitants were *antipodes* of Judea. It must be confessed, that according to the gospels the devil works marvels, which yield in nothing to those of Christ.

The flight and absence of Jesus made him lose for some time his two first disciples, Peter and Andrew. The necessity of providing for their own subsistence constrained them to resume their first trade of fishers. As their master durst not then sojourn at Jeru-

lem, he retired towards the banks of the sea of Galilee, where he recovered them. "Follow me," said he to them, "Leave your nets; of catchers of fish I will make you fishers of men." He probably made them understand, that the reflections he had made during his retirement furnished him with certain means of subsisting without toil, by the credulity of the vulgar. The two brothers forthwith followed him.

Whether Jesus had been expelled from Nazareth by his fellow citizens, or whether he had quitted it of his own accord, he departed and fixed his residence for the time at Capernaum, a maritime city, situated on the confines of the tribes of Zabulon and Naphtali. His mother, a widow, or separated from her husband, followed him: she could be useful to Jesus, and the little troop of adherents, who lived with him.

It was at this time, that our hero, seconded by his disciples, betook himself to preaching. His sermon, like that of John, consisted in saying, *Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*. We ought perhaps to fix at this period the era of the mission of Christ. John, we have seen, commenced preaching in the fifteenth year of Tiberius; it was in the same year, that his interview with Jesus took place, who caused himself to be baptized by John. It is also towards the end of this year that John disappeared: after which Jesus was in the desert, from whence he returned to reside with his mother in the city of Capernaum; there he sojourned a short time only, on account of the approach of the festival of the

passover, to celebrate which he repaired to Jerusalem. We may, therefore, fix the commencement of Christ's preaching at the sixteenth year of Tiberius; this is the only system the gospel presents. He celebrated the passover three times before his death; and the common opinion is, that his preaching lasted three years, or until the nineteenth year of the same emperor.

The rumours excited by the baptism and preaching of John, and the testimonies he bore in behalf of Christ, having died away on the imprisonment and punishment of the forerunner and flight of the Messiah, the latter resumed courage, and thought, that with the assistance of his disciples he ought to make a new attempt. Too well known, or disparaged at Nazareth, and slighted by his kinsfolk, who on all occasions seem to know what to think of him, our hero quitted that ungrateful city on purpose to establish himself, as we have remarked, at Capernaum, in the sixteenth year of Tiberius. It was there, that he betook himself to preaching his new system to some poor fishermen, and other low people. He soon however found, that his mission was too circumscribed in that place: but to acquire some eclat, he judged it necessary to perform a miracle, that is to say, in the language of the Jews, some trick capable of exciting the wonderment of the vulgar.—An opportunity occurred for this: some inhabitants of Cana, a small village of Galilee superior, at the distance of about fifteen leagues from Capernaum, invited Jesus and his mother to their wedding. The married persons were poor, although St John, who a-

lohe relates this story, gives them a steward; yet he tells us, that their wine failed at the moment the guests were half intoxicated, or gay, and that the pitchers were found empty.—Upon this Mary, who knew the power or dexterity of her son, spoke to him: *They have no wine*, said she, in an insinuating tone; Jesus answered her very roughly, and in a manner which evidently denotes a man warmed with wine: *Woman, what have I to do with thee?* It may however be supposed, that Christ had not totally lost the use of his reason, as he still possessed enough presence of mind to transmute water into wine, so that the miraculous wine was even found better than the natural wine, they had drunk at first.

This first miracle of Jesus was performed in presence of a great number of witnesses already half-drunk: but the text does not inform us, whether they were equally astonished the day following, when the fumes of the wine were dissipated. Perhaps indeed this miracle was witnessed by the steward alone, with whom it is not impossible Jesus had secret intelligence. In a word, the incredulous, less easily persuaded than the poor half-intoxicated villagers, do not observe in this transmutation of water into wine, a motive for being convinced of the divine power of Jesus.—They remark, that in the operation he employed water in order to make his wine; a circumstance which may give room to suspect, that he made only a composition, of which he, like many others, might have the secret. There was in fact no more power necessary to create wine, and fill the pitchers without putting water into

them, than to make an actual transmutation of water into wine; at least, by acting in this manner he would have removed the suspicion of having made only a mixture.

In whatever manner the miracle may have been performed, it appears to have made impression on those who saw it, or who heard it related. It is certain Jesus profited by it to extend his mission even to the capital of Judea; only giving time to his miracle to spread in order to produce its effect. In expectation of this he withdrew with his mother, brothers, and disciples to Capernaum, where he remained till the festival of the passover (the time of which was near) should collect at Jerusalem a multitude of people, before whom he flattered himself with being able to operate a great number of marvels.

CHAPTER FIFTH.

JOURNEY OF CHRIST TO JERUSALEM — THE SELLERS
 DRIVEN OUT OF THE TEMPLE --- CONFERENCE
 WITH NICODEMUS.

THE noise of the miracle at Cana having reached Jerusalem, by means of those who repaired to that city from Galilee, Jesus went there himself accompanied with some of his disciples, — but of the number of the latter we are ignorant. It was, as has been mentioned, the time of the Passover, and consequently, a moment when almost the whole nation were assembled in the capital. Such an occasion was doubtless favourable for working miracles. St John accordingly affirms, that Jesus performed a great many, without, however, detailing any of them. Several of the witnesses of Christ's power believed in him, according to our historian; but he did not place much confidence in them. The reason given for this is, "Because he knew all men, and needed not that any should testify of man; for he knew what was in man." (1) — In short, he knew every thing, except the means of giving to those who saw his miracles the dispositions he desired.

G 3

(1) St John ii. 24 and 25.

Meanwhile, how reconcile, in these new converts, faith in Jesus with the bad dispositions they were known to possess?—If he knew the unfavourable dispositions of these witnesses of his miracles, why perform them with certain loss?—In this there is a want of just inference in the writer, which must not, however, be imputed to Jesus. It is perhaps better not to refer to St John in this matter, than to believe that his sagacious master would perform miracles without design, or for the sole pleasure of working them.— Besides, in the same journey to Jerusalem, our hero performed an exploit which is as great as a miracle, and evinces a very powerful arm.

According to an ancient usage, merchants had established themselves, especially during the solemn festivals, under the porticos which environed the temple. They furnished to the devout victims and offerings, which the latter were to present to the Lord, in order to accomplish the ordinances of the law. Moreover, for the accommodation of the Jews who repaired thither from different countries, and for their own interest, the priests had permitted the money-changers to fix their offices in this place. Jesus, who on every occasion shewed himself but little favourable to the clergy, was shocked at this usage, which far from being criminal, tended to facilitate the accomplishment of the Mosaical law. He made a scourge of ropes, and displaying a vigorous arm on those merchants, drove them into the streets, frightened their cattle, and overturned the counters, without any, in their astonishment, being able to oppose his enterprise. It may be

conjectured, the people had no reason to be displeased with the disturbance, and that they profited by the money and effects which our hero overturned in the paroxysm of his zeal. No doubt his disciples did not forget themselves on this occasion; their master could by this exploit make provision for them, especially if they had been in the secret, and enable them to defray all expences during their residence in the capital. Besides, they saw in this event the accomplishment of a prophecy of the Psalmist, who foretold, that the Messiah would be "eaten up with the zeal of the house of the Lord"—a prophecy which was evidently verified by the uproar which Christ had occasioned. — With respect to the merchants, they had not, it would appear, comprehended the mystic sense of this prediction, or at least they did not expect to see it verified at their own expence. In their first surprise, they did not oppose the unexpected attacks of a man who must have appeared to them a maniac; but, on recovering from their astonishment, they complained to the magistrates of the loss they had sustained. — The magistrates, afraid, perhaps, of involving their authority by punishing a man of whom the people had become the accomplice, or a fanatic whose zeal might be approved of by devotees, did not wish to use rigor for this time; but contented themselves with sending to Jesus, to know from himself by what authority he acted—"What sign," said they to Christ, "shewest thou unto us, seeing that thou doest these things?" On which Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple," "ple, and in three days I will raise it up." It appears the Jews were not tempted to make trial of

this ;—they took him for a fool, and returned shrugging their shoulders. If, however, they had taken Christ at his word, they would have experienced great embarrassment ; for the gospel informs us, that it was not of the temple of Jerusalem he spoke, but of his own body.—He meant his resurrection, says St John, which was to happen three days after his death. The Jews had not enough discernment to divine this enigma, and the disciples themselves did not penetrate its true meaning till a long time after, that is, when they pretend their master had risen from the dead. One cannot forbear admiring Providence, which, wishing to instruct, enlighten, and convert the Jewish people by the mouth of Christ, employs only figures, allegories, and enigmatical symbols, totally inexplicable by persons the most ingenious and most experienced.

But although Jesus had the power of raising himself from the dead, he did not wish to employ his marvellous power in saving himself when in the hands of the Jews, ready to arrest and punish him as a disturber of the public repose. He thought it more convenient and prudential, to decamp without noise, and shelter himself by natural ways from the pursuit of those whom his brilliant expedition might have displeased.—He proposed therefore to withdraw from Jerusalem during night, when a devout Pharisee, wishing to be instructed, came to see him : he was called Nicodemus, and held the place of senator—a rank which does not always exempt from incredulity. “ Rabbi,” said he to Jesus, “ we know that thou art a teacher

"sent from God; for no man can do these miracles
 "that thou doest, except God be with him."

The opportunity, it seems, was favourable for Jesus to declare himself: by a single word he could have decided on his divinity, and acknowledged before that senator, so kindly disposed, that he was God. Yet he does none of this; he evades answering directly, and contents himself with saying to Nicodemus, that nobody can share in the kingdom of God, unless he be born again. The astonished proselyte exclaims, that it is impossible for a man already old to be born again, or enter of new into his mother's womb. On which Jesus replies: "I say unto thee, "except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he "cannot enter into the kingdom of God." It appears, that Nicodemus was not better satisfied than before; ~~Jesus therefore to make himself~~ more perspicuous, adds, "Knowest thou not, that what is born of the "flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit "is spirit. Marvel not, that I said unto thee, ye must "be born again.—The wind bloweth where it listeth, "and thou hearest the sound thereof, but cannot tell "whence it cometh, and whether it goeth: so is every "one that is born of the Spirit.

In spite of the precision and plainness of these instructions, (resembling enough the reasonings of our theologians,) Nicodemus, whose understanding was doubtless shut up, did not yet comprehend any part of them—"How," asks he, "can these things be?" Here Jesus, pushed to extremity, grows angry, "How,"

says he to him, "art thou a master of Israel and know-
 "est not these things? Verily, verily, I say unto thee,
 "we speak that we do know, and testify that we have
 "seen, and ye receive not our witness. If I have told
 "you earthly things, and ye believe not; how shall
 "ye believe if I tell you of heavenly things? And no
 "man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came
 "down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in
 "heaven." (2)

We thought it our duty to relate this curious dialogue, as a specimen of the logic of Jesus; the more so, as it seems to have served as a model for the fashion of reasoning observed by all the Christian doctors, who are in the use of explaining obscure things by things still more obscure and unintelligible. They terminate all disputes by referring the decision to their own testimony; that is, to the authority of the church or clergy entrusted by God himself with attesting what the faithful ought to believe.

The rest of the conversation of Jesus with Nicodemus is equally perspicuous, and in the same tone: Christ alone speaks there, and appears by dint of his reasons to have silenced the docile senator, who, it seems, retired fully convinced.—Thus it is, that a lively faith disposes the elect to yield to the lessons, dogmas, and mysteries of religion, even when it is impossible to attach any meaning to the words they hear pronounced.

(2) St John iii. 1,---13.

There is no farther mention of Nicodemus.—We know not whether he resigned his office of senator to enrol himself among the disciples of Jesus. Perhaps he was contented with secretly furnishing succours to Jesus and his troop, in gratitude for the luminous explanations he had received. There is reason to believe, that he knew how to profit by them, for St John makes him return on the scene after the death of Christ, bringing a hundred pounds weight of aloes and myrrh for the purpose of embalming his body, and interring it, with the assistance of Joseph of Arimathea. This would prove, that he had come from his conversation with Jesus a more able theologist than he had begun it. It is to be presumed, that on this occasion Jesus granted him grace effectual or sufficient, (saving grace,) without which it would have been perfectly impossible to comprehend any of his sublime theology.

It must however be owned, that the impossibility of comprehending the doctrine of Jesus furnishes to the incredulous a plausible pretext for denying that it can be divine. They cannot conceive why a God, come solely to instruct men, should never distinctly explain himself.—No oracle of Paganism employed terms more ambiguous, than the divine missionary chosen by Providence to enlighten nations. It may therefore be concluded, that in this God himself made it his study to create obstacles to his projects, and that he laid an unavoidable snare not only for the Jews, but also for all those, who must read the gospel, in order to draw from thence the knowledge most necessary to salvation; a conduct which appears equally unworthy of a good

and just God, endowed with prescience and wisdom ; yet with faith one succeeds at last in reconciling every thing, and readily comprehends why God should speak without wishing to be understood.

As soon as Jesus had quitted Nicodemus he left Jerusalem, his abode in which had become very dangerous, and betook himself to wandering thro' the country of Judea, where he enjoyed greater safety. There is reason to presume, that the scandal he had occasioned in the capital, where so great a multitude were then assembled had not failed to make him known to many ; he however succeeded in gaining partisans in the country. But how did he employ himself during this period ? St John informs us in chapter third, that he *baptized* ; thereafter he tells us in chapter fourth, that *he did not baptize*, but that his disciples baptized for him.

One thing is certain, that after this he quitted Judea on purpose to go into Galilee. It was perhaps to be still more private, or to prevent the schism, which, according to the gospel, was ready to take place between the Jews baptized by John, and those whom Jesus and his disciples had on their part baptized. Jesus conceived that prudence required him to be at a distance, in order to leave the field more free to a man whom he knew still useful to his own interests, and who, as we have seen, contented himself with playing the second part under him. It very soon appeared that Christ made a greater number of proselytes

his cousin, and this circumstance in the issue might have created a misunderstanding between them: Jesus therefore directed his march towards Samaria, whither we are to follow him, and from thence he again passed into Galilee.

H

CHAPTER SIXTH.

ADVENTURE OF JESUS WITH THE FEMALE SAMARITAN.—HIS
JOURNEY AND MIRACLES IN THE COUNTRY
OF THE GERAENEES.

It may be observed here once for all, that in this examination of the history of Jesus, we follow the most generally received order of facts, without meaning to guarantee, that things may have happened precisely in such order. Chronological mistakes do not appear of any importance, when they influence not the nature of events. Besides, the Evangelists, without fixing any era, content themselves with saying *at that time*, which at the period we live dispenses with our giving a very exact chronology of the following transactions. Farther precision would require a labour as immense as superfluous, and it would only tend to prove that the history of Jesus, dictated by the Holy Ghost, is much more incorrect than that of celebrated Pagans, even of an antiquity more remote. It would prove also, that the inspired writers of this important history contradict themselves every instant, by making their hero act at the same time in different places, and often remote from one another. On the other hand, this painful labour would not inform us which of the Evangelists we ought to follow in preference to his brethren, seeing all in the eyes of faith have equally truth on their side. Time and place change nothing in the nature of facts;

and it is from these facts, we must endeavour to form our ideas of the legislator of the Christians.

Jesus having begun his journey in the summer season, felt himself oppressed with thirst, near Sichar, in the country of Samaria; an incident which gave rise to a singular adventure. Near this city there was then a well, known by the name of *the fountain of Jacob*. Christ, fatigued with his journey, sat down on the brink of the well, waiting the return of his disciples, who had gone to the city in quest of provisions. It was about noon when a female came to draw water from the fountain; Jesus asks of her to drink out of the vessel she held; but this female Samaritan, who knew from his countenance that Jesus was a Jew, was astonished at his request, as there was no commerce or friendship between the orthodox Jews and the Samaritans. According to the custom of partisans of different sects, they detested each other most cordially. The Messiah, who was not so delicate as the ordinary Jews, undertook the conversion of the female heretic, for whose sex and profession we find in him a weakness thro' the whole course of his history. "If thou knewest," said he to her, "the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink, thou wouldst have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water." The Samaritan woman, who did not observe Jesus have any vessel in his hand, asked him from whence he would draw the living water of which he spoke. On this the Messiah, assuming a mysterious tone, answered her, "Whosoever drinketh of the water of this well shall thirst again, but who-

“soever drinketh of the water that I shall give him, shall never thirst; it shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.” — Our female adventurer, who was a dame of easy virtue, asked some of that marvellous water, calculated to exempt her from coming afterwards to draw any: Jesus, who from the discourse had been able to discover the profession of this woman, ingeniously got off from the business, by telling her to go seek her husband, and return to him; reckoning, perhaps, on being able to steal away, when she was gone. But the lady relates to him her life, gives some details of her conduct, and thereby enables him to conjecture enough of it to speak as a conjuror. Accordingly, after making her blab, he tells her, that she has had five husbands; that she has none at present, and that the man with whom she lives, is only a gallant. Immediately, the Samaritan woman takes Jesus for a forcerer or a prophet; he does not deny it, and as he was not afraid of being stoned or punished at the moment, he made bold for the first time to confess that he was the Messiah.

They were at this part of their dialogue, when the return of Jesus' disciples put an end to the conversation. The latter, whether that they knew the profession of the loquacious dame, or were more intolerant than their master, were scandalized and surprised at the *tete-a-tete*; yet none of them dared to criticise the conduct of Christ. On the other hand, the Samaritan woman seeing his retinue, believed in reality that he was a prophet or the Messiah; so leaving her pitcher, she went directly to Sichar, “Come and see,” said she

to the inhabitants, "a man who told me all things that ever I did; is not this the Christ?"—The astonished inhabitants assemble, go out and meet Jesus, and charmed with hearing him preach, without comprehending one word of his discourse, invite him to come and reside with them. He yields to their offers for two days only: the provisions purchased were put up in reserve, and the troop lived during that time at the cost of these heretics, delighted no doubt with defraying the expences of the Saviour and his followers.

All the marvellous in this adventure turns on Jesus having divined that the Samaritan lady had had five husbands, and lived at that time in criminal intercourse with a favourite. Yet it is easy to perceive, that Christ could learn this anecdote either in his conversation with the prating dame, or by public rumour, or some other very simple way.

Moreover, unbelievers find another reason for criticising this relation of St John; and laying aside the marvellous, they attack the truth of the transaction. All history attests, that in the time of Jesus Christ, Samaria was peopled by colonies of different nations, which the Assyrians had transported thither, after the destruction of the kingdom of Israel. This would seem to exclude the expectation of the Messiah, in which the Samaritans lived, according to St John. Pagans and Idolaters could not have very distinct notions of an event particular to Judea. If the Samaritans were descendants of Jacob, it was not necessary to put into the mouth of the Samaritan wo-

man these words, "Our fathers worshipped in this mountain, and ye say, Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship." It was also absurd to make Jesus say, "Ye shall no more worship the Father either in this mountain or at Jerusalem; ye worship ye know not what." First, The law of Moses does not forbid the worshipping God in whatever place one may find himself. Secondly, The laws or usages of the Jews required in the time of Christ, that one should not offer sacrifice any where except in the temple of the capital, but the places of prayer depended on every man's own will and pleasure. Thirdly, It is absurd to aver, that the descendants of Jacob did not know the God whom they adored to be Jehovah, the God of Moses and the Jews; unless it is pretended, that they did not know whom they worshipped; on this head, indeed, since the mission of Jesus, Christians have undoubtedly nothing to reproach them with. Fourthly, The words of Jesus on this occasion seem to insinuate, that he wanted to abolish the worship of the Father; at least it is certain, Christians share their homage between him and his Son, which, faith apart, appears to annihilate the dogma of the unity of God. Moreover, Jesus has not guessed rightly in saying, that the Father would be no longer worshipped either at Jerusalem, or on the mountain; this Father has not ceased one instant to be worshipped there for these eighteen centuries past by Jews, by Christians, and thereafter by Mahometans.

If it is maintained that the Samaritan woman was a

heathen, it is not very likely that she could have regarded Jesus as the Messiah, whom she behoved neither to know of nor expect. Add also to all this, that the Samaritans believe in Jesus on the word of a courtesan; a credulity of which Jews and Christians only could be susceptible. In short, Jesus and his disciples were Jews, and in that situation excluded from Samaria; so it imports not by whom the country was inhabited.

Two days having elapsed, and the Samaritans of Sichar being, in all appearance, sufficiently instructed, Jesus quitted their city, and accompanied with his disciples, took the road of Upper Galilee. In this journey, Christ, considering the bad disposition of his countrymen, thought proper not to enter the city of Nazareth, the place of his nativity. He applied to himself the famous proverb, that *a prophet has no honour in his own country.* (1) It was not so in the rest of the province; as soon as the people knew of the arrival of Jesus, they neglected nothing to welcome him. St Luke assures us that he was esteemed and honoured by every body. (2) There is reason to believe that these good people had beheld the wonders which he had operated in Jerusalem, during the festival of the passover. (3) In gratitude for these favourable dispositions, and for the faith he found among the Galileans, Christ did not content himself with instructing them, but confirmed his mission, and testified his love, by a crowd of prodigies. The number was doubtless very great, as St Matthew is constrained to say vague-

(1) St John iv. 44. (2) St Luke iv. 44. (3) St John iv. 45.

ly, that he healed all manner of sickness, and all manner of disease among the people : (4)—that it was sufficient to present to him the sick, whatever diseases they might be afflicted with : lunatics, whose number was great in that country : idiots, hypochondriacs, and persons possessed with devils, had but to fly to him for relief, and their cure was certain.

This multitude of miracles, for so they style the cures operated by Jesus, drew after him a crowd of idlers and vagabonds, as well from Galilee as from Jerusalem, Decapolis, Judea, and the country beyond Jordan. It was in this journey he made the acquisition of two famous disciples : they were brothers, sons of a fisherman of the name of Zebedee, and called James and John. The first, although very probably he could not read, composed afterwards mystical works, which are even at this day revered by Christians. With respect to John, who was a very fine lad, he became the favourite of his master, and received from him marks of distinguished tenderness. He became afterwards a sublime Platonist, and, through gratitude, deified Christ in the gospels and epistles, published in his name.

The reputation and resources of Jesus were so great in Galilee, that to augment the number of his disciples it was sufficient for him to open his mouth and speak. The two disciples already mentioned he called with an intention to keep near his person.—Wishing, however, to repose himself after the fatigues

(4) St Mat. iv. 23.

of preaching and miracles, he resolved to quit the cities, and retire to the sea coast. He conjectured, that to make himself desirable, and not waste his credit, it was prudent not to suffer himself to be seen either too long or too near. The people, fond of hearing the wonderful sermons of Jesus, followed him. — Pressed by the crowd, he happily perceived two vessels; and throwing himself into one of them, precisely that which appertained to Simon Peter, the first of his disciples, he harrangued the eager multitude from it. Thus the boat of a fisherman became a pulpit, from whence the Deity uttered his oracles.

The Galileans were not rich, and accordingly the troop of Jesus' adherents augmented. We find his four first apostles labouring in their trade of fishermen during the abode of the Messiah in the province. The day on which he preached in the vessel had not been fortunate for them; and the night preceding it had not been more favourable. Jesus, who knew more than one profession, thought, that he behoved to do something for people, who shewed so much zeal for him. When, therefore, he had finished his harrangue, and the croud had retired, he bade Simon advance into the middle of the water and cast his net; the latter excused himself, saying, that he had already thrown several times without success. But Christ insists: then Simon says to him, *I will cast it on thy word*: on which by an astonishing miracle the net breaks on all sides; Simon and Andrew are unable to drag it out; they call their comrades, and draw out of it enough of fishes to fill two ships. Our fishermen were so surprised, that Peter

took his master for a wizard, and prayed him to *depart*. But Jesus encouraged him, and promised to occasion no more the like alarms, seeing that henceforth he, Peter, should no longer busy himself with the catching of fish.

The Messiah finding himself near Cana judged it proper to enter the place, as he had once before performed a miracle there. An officer of Capernaum, whose son was sick of a fever, repaired to this village, on purpose to try the remedies of Jesus, of whose efficacy so many persons boasted. He besought the physician to come to his house, and cure his son; but our Esculapius, who did not chuse to operate before eyes too clear-sighted, got rid of this importunate person, in such a way as not to risk himself, in case he should not succeed: *Go*, said he to the officer, *thy son liveth*. The officer, while approaching his own habitation, learned, that the fever, which perhaps was intermittent, had left his son; no more was necessary to cry up the miracle, and convert all the family.

After having traversed the sea coast, and made some stay at Cana, Jesus repaired to Capernaum, where as has been related; he had fixed his residence. The family of Simon Peter was established in that city: and it was no doubt this reason joined with the bad treatment received from the inhabitants of Nazareth, that determined Christ to make choice of this residence. It appears, he was abhorred in the city where he had been educated; as soon as he attempted to preach there, the people wanted to throw him headlong; at Caper-

naum they listen to and admire him ; he harrangues in the synagogue, explains the scripture, and shews that he himself was foretold in it. In the midst of his sermon one sabbath day, they bring him a person possessed, who, perhaps in concert with him, begins to cry out with all his might ; “ Let us alone : what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth ? art thou come to destroy us ? I know thee who thou art, the holy One of God.” The people waited in terror for the issue of this adventure, when Jesus, certain of his ground, addresses himself not to the man, but to the devil possessing him, “ Hold thy peace,” says he, “ and come out of him.” Immediately the malign spirit overturned the possessed, threw him into horrible convulsions, and disappeared without any body seeing him.

Physicians, and especially those acquainted with eastern countries, do not admit miracles of the nature of this one. They know that the diseases taken for *possessions*, were owing solely to disorders produced in the brain by excessive heat. These maladies were frequent in Judea, where superstition and ignorance impeded the progress of medicine ; out of that country we find but few persons possessed with devils. This incredulity strips Jesus of a great number of his miracles ; yet, even taking away from him the *possessions*, there still remain enough. Most part of the possessed found among us, are hypochondriacs, maniacs, women hysterical, melancholy persons, and folks tormented with the vapours or spasms : or else they are impostors, who to gain money, interest the simple, and display the power of the priests, consent to receive the devil, on purpose that the

priests may have the glory of expelling him. There is scarcely a possession amongst us which could resist a flogging.

Miracles are a food for the imagination, but the body requires more substantial aliments: the adventure which has been related had led to the hour of dinner. Upon their leaving the synagogue Jesus was invited to the house of Simon Peter, where every thing appears to have been prepared, for which he might have occasion in performing a second miracle. The mother-in-law of Simon felt herself sick, at the moment they had need of her ministry in managing the kitchen. Jesus, who possessed the talent of curing very readily the kinsfolk of his disciples, takes her by the hand, and makes her rise from her bed: she comes out of it completely cured, cooks the victuals, and finds herself in a condition to serve the guests.

The same day in the dusk of the evening they brought Jesus all the sick in Capernaum, and all the possessed, whom he cured, according to St Matthew, by some words; and, according to St Luke, by laying hands on them. Several devils on coming out of the possessed had the impudence to betray the secret of the physician, and openly bare testimony, that he was Christ the *Son of God*. This indiscretion much displeased Jesus, who wished, or feigned to wish, to keep incog.—St Luke tells us, that “he rebuked them, and suffered them not to speak, for they knew that he was Christ.” Here it is proper to remark, that according to Christian theologists, the Son of God, in all his conduct,

had in view only to lead the devil astray, and conceal from him the mystery of the redemption. Yet we see, that Jesus was never able to succeed in deceiving his too cunning enemy.—In the whole Gospel system the devil is more sly and powerful than both God the Father and God the Son: At least it is certain, that he ceases not successfully to thwart their designs, and concludes with reducing God the Father to the hard necessity of making his dear Son die, in order to repair the evil which Satan had done mankind.—Christianity is real manicheism †, wherein every advantage is on the side of the bad principle, who by the great number of adherents he continues to acquire, seems to render nugatory all the purposes of the Deity.

If the devil knew that Jesus was Christ, such knowledge must have been posterior to his retirement into the desert, for he then spoke to him in a style which intimates, that he knew him not.—It is however superfluous to examine at what time the devil acquired this knowledge; but it is manifest that he had it only by divine permission. Now God, by granting to the devil the knowledge of his Son, either wished, or did not wish, that he should speak of it: if he wished, Jesus did wrong in opposing it; if he did not wish it, how was the devil able to act contrary to the divine will? Jesus conceals carefully his quality, the knowledge whereof could alone operate salvation. But in this case, the devil himself had the greatest interest to conceal it. It is therefore contrary to his own interest and the will of the Almighty, that the devil

makes known the quality of Christ. Finally, if Jesus really did not wish that the devil should discover him, why postpone imposing silence on him until he has spoken?

The conduct of the Messiah in these particulars has made it be believed, that, not daring to endanger himself by publicly assuming the quality of Christ or Son of God, he was not sincerely displeased with the devils, who were at his command, for divulging his secret, and sparing him the trouble of speaking. Besides, it was eliciting a very important confession out of the mouth of enemies.

Not to lose his influence over the minds of men, it was necessary to prevent satiety. Jesus was not ignorant of this; accordingly, on the day following that on which so many miracles had been wrought in Capernaum, he departed before day-break, and withdrew into a desert. All legislators have loved retirement; it is there they have had divine inspirations: it is on emerging from these mysterious asylums, they have performed miracles, calculated to deceive the eyes of the astonished vulgar. Besides solitary recollection is at times necessary in order to investigate the state of one's affairs.

Meanwhile the disciples of Jesus, notwithstanding his flight, did not lose sight of their master; they repaired to him at the moment he thought himself alone, and informed him, that they had been every where in search of him.—In fact, there were still ma-

ny sick and possessed persons in the country : yet this consideration did not induce Jesus to return to Capernaum ; on which account the people resorted to him in his retreat. To liberate himself, he again traversed Galilee, where he continued to cure the sick, and cast out devils : this is all the gospel mentions. It appears he tarried but little, or none at all, on his road, and preached as he went along ; for in a very short space of time he had advanced a considerable way on the shore of the sea of Galilee. As the multitude which followed him augmented continually by supplies of idle and curious people that every village produced, our preacher finding himself on the point of being pressed down by the crowd, gave orders to his disciples to convey him to the other side, on the territory of the Gerasenes.

When he was landed, a doctor of the law repaired to him, and offered to become his follower : but Jesus very readily conceived that a *doctor* could not suit him ; he would have cut a bad figure in a gang composed of fishermen and clowns, such as those of whom the Messiah had formed his court. He gave the doctor to understand, that he would repent of this step : that his kind of life would not agree with him ; *the Son of man*, says he to the doctor, *hath no where to lay his head.*

Christ would not permit his disciples to ramble too far in the territory of the Gerasenes ; for amongst them were some of that country. One asked his permission to go and perform the last duties to his father,

—another wanted to go and embrace his family ; but Jesus harshly refused their requests. The one received for answer, that he ought to “ let the dead bury their dead : ” — The other, that “ whoever having laid his hand on the plough, and looks back, is not fit for the kingdom of heaven.” The incredulous think they perceive in these answers a proof of the rough habit, repulsive and despotical spirit of Jesus, who, under pretext of the kingdom of heaven, obliged his disciples to neglect the most sacred duties of morality. But Christians, docile to the lessons of their divine Master, which they dare not examine, have made perfection consist in a total abandonment of the objects, which nature has rendered dearest to man. Christianity, seems intended only to create discord, detach men from every thing, and break the ties, which ought to unite them. There is, according to Christ’s maxims, *but one thing needful*, namely to be attached to him exclusively ; a maxim very useful in meriting heaven, but calculated to destroy every society on earth.

After our missionary had spent some time in the country of the Gerasenes, where it appears he kept incog, one day towards the evening he passed over to the other side of the lake, having previously dismissed the people, who had come that day on purpose to hear him ; but he did not preach. Jesus, fatigued, falls asleep on the passage, whilst a furious tempest overtakes the ship. His affrighted disciples impressed with the idea of their Master being more powerful when awake than when asleep, acquainted him with the danger.

This conduct drew on them reproaches for their want of faith, while it probably gave time to the tempest to subside. Then Jesus in the tone of a master commanded the sea to be still, and immediately the order was obeyed. Yet in spite of this prodigy, the faith of the disciples was still for a long time wavering. Perhaps also the tempest, whereof the Gospel gives a pompous description, was confined to a gale of wind, which subsided of itself. Jesus on this returned immediately to the country of the Gerasenes, without having either preached or performed miracles on the other side.

CHAPTER SEVENTH.

JESUS CURES TWO PERSONS POSSESSED WITH DEVILS---

MIRACLE OF THE SWINE---WONDERS PERFORMED

BY CHRIST TILL THE END OF THE FIRST

YEAR OF HIS MISSION.

JESUS, landed again in the country of the Gerasenes, took a rout, by which no person had for some time passed. Two demoniacs, inhabiting the tombs in the neighbourhood, rendered this passage dangerous. Scarcely had Christ shewn himself, when these two madmen ran to meet him. As he was a connoisseur in matters of possession, he no sooner perceived them, than he began to exorcise, in order to make the unclean spirit come out of them. Notwithstanding his divine skill, he acquitted himself very imperfectly on this occasion. It was not with one devil, but with a legion of devils he had to deal. One of them, laughing at the mistake of the Son of God, who asked him his name, answers him, *I am called Legion*. Hereupon Jesus changed his batteries, and was proceeding to dislodge them, when the devils, obstinate in continuing in the country, or very little desirous of returning to hell, proposed a capitulation. One of the articles bore, that on leaving the body of the possessed, they should enter into a herd of swine, which fed hard by

on the declivity of a hill. Jesus readily agreed, for once, to grant something on the prayer of the devils, and not use rigourously his authority. Neither he nor his disciples, as good Jews, ate pork ; he reckoned, therefore, that swine, prohibited by the law of Moses, might well serve for a retreat to devils. He consented to the treaty ; the demons came out of their former residence to enter into the swine, who, feeling Satan within them, were thrown into commotion, or perhaps were terrified in a very natural manner ; and having precipitated themselves into the sea, were drowned to the number of about two thousand.

If a legion of devils is composed of the same number as a Roman legion, we must believe, that there were six thousand devils. This evidently makes three devils for each hog, a sufficient number to induce them to commit suicide.

Some grave authors assure us, that Jesus never laughed, nor even smiled (1) ; yet it is very difficult to believe, that the Son of God could preserve his gravity after performing such a trick. But it did not appear humourous to the herdsmen, who found this fine miracle so little pleasant, that they complained of it to their masters, and run to the city, where the affair was no sooner known than the proprietors of the swine, far from being converted, bewailed a prodigy so ruinous to them, and maintained, that it was a matter of public concern. The Gerasenes went in a body to oppose the entry of Jesus into their city, and from inability to punish, besought him to consent to

leave their territory as soon as possible. Such was the effect which the miracle of the wine produced.

This memorable transaction must be true, for it is attested by three Evangelists, who, however, vary in some circumstances. St Matthew informs us, that the possessed were two in number; Mark and Luke maintain that there was only one, but so furious, according to St Mark, that they could no longer bind him *even with fetters*. St Luke is certain that the devil frequently carried him into the deserts; St Mark affirms that he spent days and nights in the tombs, and on the neighbouring mountains.

On this occasion Jesus was also proclaimed Christ by the devil. As he was among his friends, or disciples, at the time, he did not enjoin silence to Satan. The acknowledgement was useful when given in private, and could not hurt him; but there were occasions on which it might do harm if made in public, where our puissant miracle-worker evinced circumspection, especially when he did not perceive himself sufficiently supported.

Unbelievers pretend to discover important errors and evident marks of falsehood in the narrative, which also appears ridiculous. 1st, They are surprised to see devils, who, according to Christians, are condemned to eternal torments in hell, leaving it on purpose to take possession of the inhabitants of this earth. 2dly, There is reason to be astonished at seeing the devils address prayers to the son of God. It is an article of

faith among Christians, that to pray grace is requisite; that the damned cannot pray; and much more so, that this grace must be denied to the chiefs of the damned.

3dly, One is offended at a miracle, by which Jesus benedicted two persons possessed with devils at the expence of the proprietors of two thousand swine, to whom this miracle cost at least twenty thousand crowns of French money; an action not quite agreeable to the rules of equity.

4thly, One cannot conceive how Jews, whom their law inspired with a horror towards swine, could have herds of animals which among them were of no use, and which they could not even touch without being defiled.

5thly, It is indecorous to make the son of God enter into a compromise with devils, ridiculous to make them enter into swine, and finally unjust to make them enter into other people's swine.

Moreover, we are not informed what became of these devils after being precipitated into the sea. There is reason to believe, that in coming out of the swine they entered into the Jews, to procure for our Saviour the pleasure of casting them out again, for the curing of people possessed was of all miracles that wherein our gentleman was most expert.

With respect to the possessed person cured by Jesus, penetrated with gratitude to his physician, with whom he was perhaps previously acquainted, he wanted to follow Christ, according to St Mark; but it was foreseen that his testimony might become suspicious, if he put himself in the train of the Messiah, who therefore chose rather that he should repair to his family and

announce the mercies he had received from the Lord. He was a native of Decapolis, a country, as we have seen, very much disposed to believe. And accordingly, as soon as the man had there recounted his adventure, every body was transported with admiration.—We are, however, astonished at the difference of disposition between these folks so remarkable for a docile faith and the Gerasenes; the inhabitants of Decapolis believe all without seeing any thing, whilst the Gerasenes, eye witnesses of the prodigy, are not moved by it, and uncivilly refuse Jesus admittance into their city. We commonly find in the gospel, that to witness a miracle is a very strong reason for not believing it.

The hardness of heart and unbelief of the Gerasenes, and particularly the request they made the Messiah not to enter among them, obliged him to reembark with his gang, and return to Galilee, where he was very kindly received. It is not, however, related whether he preached and performed miracles; and even the time he continued there is not accurately known.—The friends of Jesus, and the relations of his disciples and mother, received, as it appears, from time to time intelligence of his wonders, which they took care to circulate: and on learning that they wanted him, he returned to Capernaum. Scarcely was his arrival known, when the people, always fond of sermons and miracles, resorted to him in crowds. Neither his house nor the space before the door could contain the multitude; he required the voice of a Stentor to make himself be heard at the extremities of the croud; but perhaps

the idlers content with following him, without knowing why, were but very little troubled about understanding his orations.

The Pharisees, to whom Jesus' success began to give umbrage, resolved to satisfy themselves, if there was any reality in what was reported of him. To clear up the matter, some doctors of Galilee, who were not of the number of our missionary's admirers, repaired to him. They heard him preach, and came from his sermons more prepossessed against him; even his miracles could not convert them. Yet according to St. Luke, the power of the Lord was displayed in their presence in the cure of the sick. But as has been remarked, the miracles of the Messiah were calculated to convince those only who did not see them. Thus it is, that these miracles are believed at present by people who would not credit those performed in their presence. Every body at Paris believes the miracles of Jesus, and several bold spirits doubt those of the Jansenists, of many whereof they were eye-witnesses.

Four men who carried a paralytic on his bed, unable to penetrate through the croud so far as Jesus, were advised to mount up with the burden to the roof of the house, and making an opening there, to let down the sick man in his bed, and lay him at the physician's feet.—The idea appeared ingenious and new to the latter; accordingly, addressing the sick man, "My son," said he, "be of good courage, thy sins are forgiven thee." This absolution or remission was

no doubt, pronounced so as to be heard by the emifary doctors who were very much offended at it. Jesus sagaciously divining their dispositions, addressed his discourse to them, "Why do you suffer wicked thoughts to enter into your hearts? which is easier to say to this paralytic, Thy sins are forgiven thee; or to say to him, Arise, take up thy bed and walk?" This question boldly proposed, in the midst of a fanatical people, the sport of prejudice, embarrassed the doctors who did not think proper to answer it. Then Jesus, profiting by their embarrassment, said to the paralytic, informed of the part he had to play, *Arise, take up thy bed, and go into thine house.*—This prodigy impressed their minds with terror: it especially made our doctors, the spies, tremble, while the people exclaimed, "Never have we seen before any thing so wonderful."

But if the doctors were afraid, they were not converted; and notwithstanding the cure of the paralytic, they had no faith in the absolution granted by Jesus. It may therefore be supposed, that this miracle was attended with circumstances which rendered it suspicious to them; perhaps the gospel itself will enable us to discover them.

We will first observe, that when the same fact is differently related by different historians equal in authority, we are constrained to doubt it, or at least are entitled to deny that it has happened in the manner supposed. This principle of criticism must apply to the narratives of our inspired writers as well as to those of

others.—Now, St Matthew tells us merely, that a paralytic was presented to Jesus, who cured him, without relating the wonderful circumstance of the roof being perforated, and the other ornaments with which St Mark and St Luke have embellished their narrative. Thus, either we are in the right in suspending our belief as to this fact, or we may believe at least, that it has not occurred in the manner related by the two last evangelists. (2)

In the second place, Mark and Luke, who say, that the sick man was elevated on his bed to the top of the house in which Christ was, having previously informed us the croud was so great, that the bearers of the diseased were unable to force their way through it, suppose, without expressing it in words, another very great miracle. In fact this operation presupposes, that the carriers have penetrated through the crowd. Arrived, one knows not how, at the foot of the wall, they could not singly, and far less loaded with the sick man clamber up to the roof of the house. Luke says, they made an opening through the tyles: in that case the people must have perceived them; and particularly those in the inside of the house, during the silent attention they no doubt lent to the discourse of Jesus, behoved to hear the noise made by the men in raising up a bed to the roof, and afterwards uncovering this roof and making a hole in it, through which to convey the sick man.—This operation became more difficult still, if the roof, instead of being covered with tyles, was flat:—Now, all the houses of the Jews and orientals were, and still are, covered in this manner. All these

difficulties furnish sufficient motives for doubting this grand miracle. It will become more probable, if we suppose, that the sick man was already in the house with Jesus; that things were previously arranged, and that they let down by a trap-door, made on purpose, a paralytic most certain of being cured on command of the Messiah. This transaction might appear marvellous to a populace disposed to see prodigies every where, but it made less impression on the doctors, who had come on purpose closely to scrutinise the conduct of our adventurer; they conjectured, it was dangerous to contradict weak fanatics, but they did not, for all that, credit the miracle they had witnessed.

Some days thereafter, Jesus went and preached along the sea coast, and passing near the custom-house perceived Matthew, one of the officers, who sat there. His mein pleased the Messiah, on whose invitation our subaltern financier quitted his post, and followed him, after having in the first place given a great entertainment to Jesus and his gang. Matthew presented to him as guests, publicans, and toll-bar officers, his brethren, and others of similar repute; but the Pharisees and doctors, who watched the behaviour of Christ, came purposely to Matthew's house to be assured of the fact. Jesus, occupied no doubt with gratifying his appetite, did not at first observe that he was watched. Some words, however, spoken rather loudly, attracted his attention; it was the doctors who reproached the disciples with drinking and eating with folks of crazy reputation; "How," probably said they to them, "how dares your master, who

"constantly preaches up virtue, sobriety, and repentance, shew himself publicly in such bad company? How can he associate with knaves, monopolizers, and men whom their extortions render odious to the nation? Why does he carry in his train women of bad lives, such as Susan (3) and Jane who accompany him continually." The disciples, stunned in this manner, knew not well what reply to make; but Jesus, without being disconcerted, answered them with a proverb:—"It is not the whole," said he, "but the sick who have need of a physician." After this he cites a passage of scripture, which cannot now be found in it, "Learn," said he to them, "the truth of this saying, *I love mercy better than sacrifice.*" It appears, the doctors did not consider themselves defeated, for Jesus was so transported with passion as to say, that he, "came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance." In that case why did he reject the Pharisees and doctors, whom he called *whitened sepulchres*? Either the adversaries of Jesus were righteous or they were sinners, whom he was come to call to repentance, and consequently he ought not to renounce them.

Whatever reason Jesus might employ to palliate or justify his conduct, it was very soon bruited abroad. John Baptist's disciples who heard it, and whom perhaps jealousy excited, came in search of him, and asked the reason of the difference in the life he and his disciples led, and that which they themselves led. "We fast," said they, "continually, whilst you and your followers make very good cheer. We prac-

“tise austerities and live in retirement, whilst you
 “run about incessantly, and frequent the company of
 “persons of evil repute,” &c. The reproach was
 embarrassing, but Jesus got himself off very well :
 “The friends of the bridegroom,” replied he,
 “ought neither to fast nor live in sorrow whilst
 “they have the bridegroom with them : a time will
 “come when the bridegroom shall be taken away
 “from them ; and then they shall fast. No man put-
 “teth a piece of new cloth on an old garment ;—nei-
 “ther do men put new wine into old bottles :—and
 “no person asks for new wine when he can get old,
 “for he finds the old better.” John’s disciples had
 no reply to reasons so sublime and convincing. It ap-
 pears that Jesus, whose example is followed by our
 modern doctors, easily got out of this affair by the aid
 of an enigmatical symbol, or pompous balderdash ;
 very proper arguments to shut the mouths of those
 who are not inclined to dispute eternally about what
 they do not understand.

Moreover, this incident demonstrates, that the Pha-
 risees and doctors were not the only persons who were
 offended with the conduct of Jesus and the company
 he frequented ; a truth confirmed by the gospel. (4)
 We must observe, that this trait in the conduct of
 Christ plainly decides the cause in favour of the Je-
 suits and partizans of lax morality, and furnishes them
 with victorious arms against the Jansenists and modern
 puritans. We may also remark that the actions and
 expressions of Jesus on this occasion authorise and jus-
 tify the conduct and language of our holy guides, and

especially our lords the bishops, who, when reproached with their iniquitous behaviour, shut our mouths by averring, that *we ought to do as they tell us, and not what they do.*

It cannot be denied that the discrepancy, which existed between the conduct of Jesus and the principles adopted by the Jews, or even in his own doctrine, required great miracles to prove his mission. Our missionary was not ignorant of this; prodigies, therefore, were commonly the strongest of his arguments, and of a nature well calculated to gain the vulgar, who never pique themselves on reasoning, but are ready in every thing to side with the man who exhibits wonders, and acquires the secret of gaining their fancy.

After Jesus had silenced John's disciples, the chief of a synagogue waited on the Saviour, and besought him to come and lay hands on his daughter, twelve years old, *who was dead*, according to St Matthew, but who was only *very sick*, according to St Mark and St Luke: a difference which seems to merit some attention. Jesus complied with the invitation; and whilst proceeding towards the house, overheated himself so much, that *a virtue went out of him*, fit to cure all those who were in its atmosphere. We will not form conjectures on the nature of this virtue or divine transpiration; we will only remark, that it was so potent as to cure suddenly a woman afflicted for twelve years with an issue of blood; a malady which probably the spectators had not better verified than its cure, — On this occasion Christ perceived that there had

gone out of him a considerable dose of virtue; he therefore turns about towards the female afflicted with the piles, whom his disciples had rudely pushed back, and seeing her prostrate at his feet, "Daughter," says he to her, "be of good heart, thy faith hath made thee whole." The poor woman, whom the disciples had intimidated, charmed with being relieved from her fright in so easy a manner, confessed openly that she was cured.

When our miracle-performer was arrived at the house of Jairus, (such was the name of the chief of the synagogue,) they came and announced to the latter that his daughter had expired a moment before, and that the house was full of minstrels, who were already performing a dirge, or mournful concert, according to the custom of the country. Jesus, who on the way had got the father of the girl to prattle, was not disconcerted at the news; he begins with making every body retire, and then having entered alone, by the virtue of some words raises her from the dead.

In historical matters, we must prefer two writers who agree, to a third who contradicts them. Now Luke and Mark affirm, that the damsel was dead; but here unfortunately it is the hero *himself* who weakens his victory. On their saying to him that the damsel was dead, he affirms that *she is only asleep*. There are actually girls who at twelve years of age are subject to such swoons. On the other hand, the father of the damsel appears to have acquainted the physician with the condition of his child; and he, more in the secret

than others, did not believe the intelligence of her death. He entered alone into her chamber, well assured of her recovery if she was only in a swoon: if he had found her dead in reality, there is every reason to believe, he would have returned, and told the father, that he had been called when too late, and was vexed at the accident.

Jesus, however, did not wish that this miracle should be published;—he forbade the father and mother of the damsel to tell what had happened. Our charlatan was not solicitous to divulge an affair which might excite more and more the indignation and fury of the Jews of Jerusalem, whither he was soon after to repair, on purpose to celebrate the Passover.—Moreover, the relation of this miracle seems to evince that the Son of God had acquired in Egypt some smattering of medicine; it appears at least that he was versant in the spasmodic diseases of women; and no more was wanting to induce the vulgar to regard a man as a sorcerer, or performer of miracles.

Once in the train of operating wonders, Jesus did not rest satisfied with this one. According to St Matthew, (who alone relates the three facts we are going to mention;) two blind men who followed him began to exclaim, *Son of David, have mercy upon us.* Altho' Jesus in his quality of God knew the most secret thoughts of men, he chose to be *viva voce* assured of the disposition of the sick people with whom he transacted.—He therefore asked, if they had much faith, or if they sincerely believed that he was able to do what

they requested of him. Our blind folks answered in the affirmative; then touching their eyes, "Be it unto you," said he, "according to your faith," and instantly they received their sight.

One knows not how to reconcile such lively faith in two blind men with the untractableness they afterwards displayed. Their physician, who might have good reasons for not being known, most expressly forbids them to speak of their cure; they however spread it instantly thro' the country. The silence of those, who were witnesses of this great miracle, is not more astonishing than the indiscretion of the blind men, who were the objects of it.

A fact more miraculous still is the obduracy of the Jews, which was so stubborn that the many wonders performed one after another, and on the same day, were not able to convince the doctors. Nevertheless, Jesus, far from being discouraged, wanted still farther to exhibit a specimen of his power. A dumb man, possessed with a devil, was presented to Christ, who expelled the demon out of him; and the dumb began to speak. At sight of this miracle, the people, as usual, were in extasy, whilst the Pharisees and doctors, who had also exorcists among them, saw nothing surprising in it: they pretended only, that their exorcists performed their conjurations in the name of God, whilst Jesus made his in name of the devil. Thus they accused Christ of casting out the devil by the devil, which was indeed a contradiction. But this contradiction did not prove the divinity of Jesus; it proved only

that the Pharisees were frequently capable of talking nonsense and contradicting themselves, like all superstitious and credulous people. When theologists dispute, we very soon discover, that the wranglers on both sides alike speak nonsense, and by contradicting themselves impugn their own authority. (5)

CHAPTER EIGHTH.

OF WHAT JESUS DID DURING HIS ABODE AT JERUSALEM; THAT
IS, AT THE SECOND PASSOVER IN HIS MISSION.

OUR doctor had closed the first year of his mission in a very glorious manner. He repaired to Jerusalem with a view to try his fortune, gather the fruit of his labours, or in fine, form a party in the capital, which he hoped to carry, after having acquired adherents in the country.—There was indeed every reason to believe, that the noise of the wonders which he had operated the year preceding in Galilee would produce a lively effect on the populace of Jerusalem; but it produced effects very opposite to those which Jesus had hoped for or foreseen. It might be said, that the infernal legion, which he had commanded to pass into the swine of the Gerasenes, had fixed their abode in the heads of the inhabitants of that city, more enlightened and less credulous than the inhabitants of the country. The gospel shews us in the former only an incredible hardness of heart: in vain Christ wrought before their eyes a multitude of prodigies calculated to confirm the wonders related to them: in vain did he employ his divine rhetoric to demonstrate to them, in the clearest manner he was able, the divinity of his mission; all his efforts served only to redouble the choler of his enemies, and induce them to devise means to punish a

man, whom they persisted in regarding as a juggler, a charlatan, and a dangerous impostor.

It is true, the adversaries of Jesus surprised him sometimes at fault—They reproached him with violating the ordinances of a law venerated by them as sacred, and from which he had promised never to depart—They regarded these violations as a proof of heresy; and it did not enter their heads that a God could raise himself above ordinary rules, and possess the right of changing every thing. They were Jews,—and therefore obstinately attached to their divine ordinances; and they did not conceive, how a true messenger of God could allow himself to trample under foot what they were accustomed to regard as sacred and agreeable to the Deity.

So many obstacles did not discourage Jesus—The Messiah wanted to succeed at any price: And altho', without a miracle he might have foreseen what would be the issue of his enterprise, he was sensible that he must conquer or die—that fortune favours only the brave, and that it was necessary to play an illustrious part, or tamely consent to languish in misery in the solitude of some obscure village in Galilee.

On arriving at Jerusalem, he devoted his first cares to sick paupers—the rich had their own physicians.—At this time there was in the city, and near the Sheep port, a fountain, or famous pool, of which, however, with the exception of the Gospel, no historian has ever spoken, altho' from its properties it well deserved

to be transmitted to posterity. It was a vast edifice, round which stretched five magnificent galleries; besides, the sheet of water inclosed by it possessed admirable properties—but these were known only to poor people and mendicants; and they knew them, doubtless, by a particular revelation. Under these galleries, were seen languishing a great number of wretches, who patiently waited for a miracle. God, on giving to the water of this pool the faculty of curing all diseases, had annexed a condition to it—The first who could plunge himself therein after an angel had troubled it, which happened only at a certain time, could alone obtain the prerogative of being cured. The chief magistrate of Jerusalem, who probably knew not of the existence of this marvel, had not established there any regulation of police. The most forward and agile of the paralytics or sick, and such as had friends always in readiness to throw them into the water when it had been troubled, ravished, often very unjustly, the mercy of being delivered from their diseases.

A paralytic, among others, had been there for thirty-eight years, without any body having had the charity to lend him a helping hand in descending to the fountain. Jesus, who beheld him lying on his bed, asks him if he wanted to be cured. "Yes," answered the sick man, "but I have nobody to put me into the water when it is troubled." That signifies nothing, replied Jesus,—“Arise, take up thy bed, and walk.” This wretched man, perhaps, not unlike many of our beggars, who, to soften the public, feign

diseases they do not labour under, and who on this occasion might be gained over for some trifle to be accessory to the farce,—this miserable, I say, did not leave him to speak twice—on the order of Jesus he took up his couch and departed.

Among the Jews, however, they did not, as among us, promenade on festival days. This cure was performed on the sabbath. Our paralytic having been met by a man of the law, the latter reprimanded him for violating the ordinances of religion by carrying his bed. The transgressor had no other excuse to give, but that he who had cured him had at the same time commanded him to carry away his bed.—He was then questioned about the person who had given this order;—there is, however, reason to believe that he knew nothing of him: Jesus had not made himself known;—and as if the action had been very ordinary, the person on whom the miracle had been performed had not informed himself of the author of it.—Here the matter dropt, as they made no farther enquiry. But Jesus having sometime after met the paralytic, made himself known to him, and then the latter informed the Jews of the name of his curer. These Hebrews were so irritated, that from this instant they formed the design of getting Christ put to death, *because, according to St John, he had done these things on the Sabbath day.* (1)

Nevertheless, it is not probable that this was the true cause of the rage of the Jews. However scrupulous one supposes them, it is to be presumed that their

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(1) St John v. 1—16.

physicians and surgeons did not think themselves obliged to refuse their cures to the sick on the Sabbath. There is reason to believe, that Jesus not content with curing, did moreover order those he cured to violate the Sabbath by carrying their bed, which was *a servile work*: or rather these unbelievers regarded the miracles of the Saviour as mere delusions, impostures, tricks of dexterity, and himself as a cheat who might excite disturbances.

Jesus having learned that the Jews were ill disposed towards him on account of the transaction of the Sabbath, which they accused him of violating, attempted to justify himself. He made a fine discourse tending to prove, that he was the son of God, and that his Father authorised him not to observe the Sabbath. But he took care not to explain himself very distinctly on this *filiation*; and by his ambiguous language he insinuated the eternity of his Father, but did not call him God. Yet the Jews, divining his object, were very much offended at this pretension. (2) He changed therefore his batteries, and threw himself on the necessity by which he acted. *Verily*, said he to them, *the Son does nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do. The Father, who loves him, adds he, sheweth him all things that he himself doeth, and he will shew him greater works than these.* By these expressions Christ seems to overthrow his own eternity and infinite knowledge, for he announces himself as susceptible of learning something, or as the ape of the Divinity.

To impress the minds of these unbelievers, whom his enigmatical jargon could not convince, he declares, that henceforth the Father will no longer intermeddle in judging men, but had devolved that care on his Son. Altho' the Jews expected a great judge, they were not yet staggered. Then, for want of arguments more demonstrative, Christ, like our Christian teachers, took the resolution to intimidate his audience, knowing well that fear always hinders one from employing reason. He gave them therefore to understand, that the end of the world was near, which ought to make them tremble.

The testimony of John-Baptist, had, as we have seen, facilitated the first successes of Jesus; but on the other side, the difference they had remarked between the conduct of the latter and that of the forerunner, destroyed the force of this testimony; our orator pretended therefore to have no need of it, and strove even to weaken its value. *He was a burning and a shining light* to them; *you were willing for a season to rejoice in his light, I have a greater witness than his.* Here he appeals to his works which he maintains to be infallible proofs of his divine mission. He undoubtedly forgot at this moment that he spoke to people who regarded his marvellous deeds as delusions and impostures; his works were precisely the thing which it was necessary to prove even to the very Jews, who saw them performed. Yet this manner of reasoning has been since adopted with success by Christian doctors, who, when doubts or objections are advanced against the mission of Jesus, throw themselves immediately on his

miraculous works, which were at all times incapable of convincing the very persons who they tell us, had been witnesses of them.

Among the proofs employed by Christ to exalt his mission, he advances one, whose only tendency is to destroy the mission of Moses, and make him be regarded as an impostor. He tells them, *You have never heard the voice of my Father*; whilst it was on the voice of this father, of whom Moses was the interpreter, that all the law of the Jews was founded. However, after having thus annihilated the authority of scripture, our orator wishes farther to prop his mission on the same scriptures, by which, according to him, he was announced. "Fear," says he, "the Father; I will not be the person who will accuse you before him; it will be Moses, in whom you trust, because you believe not in him; for if you believed in him, you would also believe in me. I am come in the name of the Father, and you pay no attention to it, another will come in his own name, and you will believe in him."

The hearers of this sermon were not moved by it: they found it unconnected, contradictory, offensive and blasphemous; the fear of seeing the end of the world arrive did not hinder them from perceiving the want of just inference in the orator, who took away from his father, and restored to him, the quality of judge of men, which he had at first appropriated to himself. Besides it would appear, the Jews were of good courage as to this end of the world, which events had so

often belied. Their posterity, who beheld the world subsisting after this, notwithstanding the express prediction of Jesus and his disciples, have founded their repugnance for his doctrine, among other things, on this want of accomplishment. (3) In a word, from his sublime discourse the incredulous conclude, that it is very difficult for an impostor to speak long without contradicting and detecting himself.

The inefficacy of his harrangue made Jesus perceive, that it was in vain to prosecute the plan of miracles in order to draw over to his party the Jews of Jerusalem. He forbore therefore to perform them, altho' the circumstance of the festival of the passover would seem to furnish him with a very favourable opportunity.—It even appears, he was completely disgusted with the incredulity of these wretches, who shewed themselves noways disposed to witness the great things, which he had exhibited with success to the inhabitants of Galilee. To see miracles, there must be a simplicity, more rare in a capital than in the country; besides, if the populace are well disposed even in large cities, the magistrates and best informed persons commonly oppose a bulwark against credulity. (4)

The same thing happened to our thaumaturge in Jerusalem. Perhaps he despaired of the salvation of these infidels: during the short space of time he sojourned in that city, he kept no measures with them; he loaded them with abusive language; but it does not appear, that this plan gained proselytes, although since that time his disciples and the priests have fre-

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(3) St John v. 17---47

quently endeavoured to succeed by the like means, and even by coercion.

In short, in this journey, Jesus had no success—his disciples did not meet with good cheer; to sustain life they were reduced to the necessity of stealing a little corn in the environs of the city; and were surprised at this occupation on the Sabbath-day.—The violation of the law appeared to the Jews a greater crime than theft. In vain complaint was made to their master; from him no satisfaction could be obtained. He paid off the Pharisees by comparing what his disciples had done with the conduct of David, who himself on an emergency ate, and also made his followers eat, the *shew-bread*, the use whereof the law reserved for the priests alone: (5) adding furthermore, that *the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath; therefore he concluded that the Son of man is Lord of the Sabbath.* (6)

Critics have remarked in several circumstances of the life of our man God, that his humanity was frequently liable to commit mistakes. For example, On the occasion we speak of, he gives the name of Abiathar to the high priest, who permitted David to eat the shew bread. The Holy Ghost however informs us, in the first book of Kings, that this high priest was called *Achimelech*. The error would be nothing, if an ordinary man had fallen into it, but it becomes embarrass-

(5) 1 Kings or Samuel xxi. 5.

(6) St Matth. xii. St Mark ii. St Luke vi.

sing in a man-God, or in a God made man, whom we ought to suppose incapable of blunders.

On the same occasion, Jesus to justify the larceny of his disciples maintains, that the priests themselves violate the Sabbath, by serving God in the temple on that day; and this according to the principles of our theology is styled visibly confounding *servile* works with *spiritual* works. But this is to have the same idea of a robbery and of the oblation of a sacrifice; it is to tax God with being ignorant of what he did by ordaining, at one and the same time, the observance and the violation of a day, which he had consecrated to repose.

Farther, our doctors justify the larceny approved by Christ, with saying, that as God, he was absolute master of all things; but in that case he ought to have procured better cheer to his disciples. It would not have cost him more to have permitted them to pillage the table of some rich financier of Jerusalem, or even that of the high priest who lived at the expence of God his Father, than to permit his disciples to forage in the fields of the poor inhabitants of the country. But at least, necessary it was previously to verify such sovereignty over all things in the eyes of the Jews, who, from not knowing this important truth, were naturally offended at the robbery which the Son of God seemed to authorise. Moreover, it is apparently on this principle several Christian doctors have pretended, that *all things appertain to the just*; that it is permitted them to seize on the property of infidels and

the unholy, that the clergy have right to levy contributions on the people, and that the Pope may dispose of crowns at his pleasure. In short, it is on this principle that actions are defended, which our unbelievers regard as usurpations and violence exercised by Christians on the inhabitants of the new world. Hence one sees, that it is of great importance to Christians not to depart from the example which Jesus has given them in this passage of the gospel; it appears especially to interest the power of the Pope and the rights of the clergy.

Pretensions, so well founded, did not however strike the carnal minds of the Jews; they persisted in believing, that it was not permitted to rob, particularly on the Sabbath; and not knowing the extent of the rights of Jesus, they took him for an impostor, and his disciples for knaves. They believed him to be a dangerous man, who, under pretence of reforming the Hebrews, sought only to subvert their laws, trampled on their ordinances, and strove to overturn their religion. They agreed therefore among themselves, to collect the proofs they had against him, accuse and cause him to be arrested; but our hero, who had information of their designs, frustrated them by leaving Jerusalem.

CHAPTER NINTH.

JESUS WORKS NEW MIRACLES---ELECTION OF THE
TWELVE APOSTLES.

AS soon as Jesus had secured himself from the malicious intention of his enemies, he betook himself again to the working of miracles, with a view to give fresh proofs of his mission to persons of more favourable dispositions than the inhabitants of Jerusalem. His experience evinced, that to gain the capital it was still necessary to augment his forces in the environs, and procure in the country a great number of adherents, who might, in due time and place, aid him in vanquishing the incredulity of priests, doctors, and magistrates; and put him in possession of the holy city, the object of his eager desires.

These new prodigies, however, produced no remarkable effect. It appears, that the Jews who had been at Jerusalem during the festival of the Passover, on returning home, prepossessed their fellow-citizens against our adventurer. If he found the secret of gaining the admiration of the people in the places he passed thro' on leaving the capital, he had the chagrin to find opponents in the Pharisees and doctors of these places. The following fact demonstrates to what a degree these people were prepossessed.—On

a sabbath day, Jesus enters into the synagogue of a place, the name of which has not been preserved.—He found there, perhaps by chance, a man who had, or said he had, a withered hand. The sight of the diseased, who was probably some noted mendicant and knave, and the presence of the physician, or forger of suspicious miracles, excited the attention of the doctors. They watched Jesus closely — “Let us see,” said they to one another, “if he will dare to heal this man on the sabbath day.” But observing that Jesus remained inactive, they questioned him on the head of the sabbath, of which, on so many occasions, he had appeared to make but little account. It was apparently one of the principal points of his reform. He was perhaps sensible, like us, of the utility of abrogating a great number of festivals. Be that as it may, the doctors asked him, “Master, is it lawful to heal on this day?” Christ was frequently in the habit of answering one question by another:—Logic was not the science in which the Jews were most conversant. Jesus replied to them, “Is it lawful to do good on the sabbath day, or to do evil?—to save life, or to take it away?” This question, according to St Mark, confounded the doctors. Nevertheless, there is reason to believe, unless we suppose the Jews to have been a hundred times more stupid than they really were, that this question was very ill timed. They were prohibited from applying to servile occupations only, but must have been permitted to discharge the most pressing obligations of morality even on the sabbath day. It is to be presumed, that a midwife, for example, lent her ministry on that day, as on every other. (1)

Jesus continued his questions. and asked them, if when a sheep fell into a ditch on the sabbath day, they would not draw it out? From hence, without waiting for an answer, he very justly concluded, that it was permitted to do good on the sabbath. To prove it, he said to the sick, whom he had perhaps suborned to play this scene in the synagogue, "Arise, stand up, "and stretch forth your hand;" and immediately his hand became as the other. But Jesus, remarking that this prodigy operated no change in their minds, darted a furious look on the assembly, and, boiling with a holy choler, forsook instantly the detestable place;

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He acted wisely; for these naughty doctors went immediately, and took counsel with the officers of Herod, "how they might destroy him." Jesus, who by his adherents was informed of every thing, gained the sea shore, where it was always easy for him to effect his escape. His disciples, several of whom understood navigation, followed him thither. A multitude of people, more credulous than the doctors, repaired to him on the noise of his marvels. There came to him hearers from Galilee, from Jerusalem, from Idumea, from the other side Jordan, and even from Tyre and Sidon. This multitude furnished him with a pretext for giving directions to his disciples to hold a bark in readiness that he might not be too much thronged, but in truth, to escape in case it should be attempted to pursue him.

(2) St Matt. xii. St Mark vii. & xi.

On this shore, favourable to his designs, Jesus performed a great number of miracles, and cured an infinity of people unknown; we must piously believe it on the word of St Matthew and St Mark. (3) All these wonders were performed on the sick, and especially on the possessed. The latter, at whatever distance they perceived the Saviour, prostrated themselves before him, rendered homage to his glory, and proclaimed him the Christ; whilst he, always full of modesty, commanded them with threats not to reveal him;—the whole to accomplish a prophecy, which said of him, *He shall not dispute, nor cry, nor make his voice be heard in the streets*; (4)—a prophecy, which however was frequently contradicted by his continual disputes with the doctors and Pharisees, by the uproar he frequently occasioned in the temple, the streets of Jerusalem, and the synagogues in the neighbourhood.

Nothing is more astonishing than the obstinacy of the devil, in acknowledging Jesus and confessing his divinity, and the stubbornness of the doctors in not recognising him, in spite of his cares to make the one silent and to convince the others. It is evident, that the son of God has come with the sole intent of preventing the Jews from profiting by his coming, and acknowledging the titles of his mission; it may be said that he has shewed himself merely to receive the homage of the devil! at least we perceive only Satan and his disciples proclaiming aloud the quality of Jesus.

(3) St Mat. xii. St Mark iii. St Luke vi.

(4) Isaiah xlii. 2.

When Christ had preached much, cured much, and exorcised much, he wished to be alone for some time, to reflect on the situation of his affairs. With a view to enjoy more liberty, he went up into a mountain, where he spent the whole night. The result of his solitary reflections and prayers was, that he stood in need of assistants; but that he could no longer, without giving umbrage to the government, continue marching up and down with a company so numerous as that of the idlers which he dragged after him in his suite.

When day appeared, he called his disciples, at least those among them, whom he judged most worthy of confidence, and selected twelve of them to remain near his person. (5) This is what St Luke says; but St Mark insinuates, that he chose his twelve apostles on purpose to send them on a mission. As Jesus himself however assures us, that he chose them *to be near to him*, and as the apostles, content with begging and making provision for themselves and their master, did not perform any mission during the life of Jesus, at least out of Judea, we will adhere to the first opinion.

The names of these apostles were as follows; Simon Peter, Andrew, Matthew, Simon-Zelotes, James, Philip, Thomas, Jude, John, Bartholomew, another James, and Judas Iscariot the treasurer of the gang:

Jesus had not money to give such of his disciples as he was about to send on mission: he told them no

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(5) St Luke vi. 13. St Mark iii. 13.

doubt to go and push their fortune.—He however took care to impart to them his secrets, teach them the art of miracles, and give them receipts to cure diseases and cast out devils; in short he communicated to them the power of remitting sins, to bind and to unbind in the name of Heaven; prerogatives, which, if they did not enrich the apostles, have been worth immense treasures to their successors.—To the latter, the roughest staff has become a *crozier*, a staff of command, making its power felt by the most puissant sovereigns of the earth. The *bag* or *wallet* of the apostles has been converted into treasures, benefices, principalities, and revenues; permission to beg has become a right to exact tenths, devour nations, fatten on the substance of the wretched, and enjoy, by *divine right*, the privilege of pillaging society, and disturbing it with impunity. In short, the successors of these first missionaries, sent by Jesus Christ, became mendicants, who enjoyed the prerogative of knocking down all those who refused to bestow charities on them, or to obey their commands. Many people have imagined, that Jesus never concerned himself about the subsistence of the ministers of the church; but if we examine attentively the gospel, and especially the acts of the apostles, we will find there the basis of the riches, grandeur, and even despotism of the clergy. It is never but to benefit themselves and their confidants, that impostors devise reforms, or institute sects,

CHAPTER TENTH.

SERMON ON THE MOUNT.—SUMMARY OF THE MORALITY OF
JESUS.—OBSERVATIONS ON THAT MORALITY.

THE dread of being arrested having constrained Jesus to abandon the cities, where he had too many enemies, the country became his ordinary residence. The people, affected by his lessons, or at least some male and female devotees whom he had converted, furnished provisions to the divine man and his troop. Obligated to wander about incessantly, bury themselves in mountains and deserts, and sleep in the open air, our apostles behoved frequently to be discontented with their lot; and this kind of life, compared with that which had preceded it, must have appeared to them very distressing, and often create murmurs. Spite of the multitude of spiritual graces, which they could not fail to receive in the society of the Messiah, these carnal men expected quite otherways on devoting themselves to his service. They were doubtless promised important posts, riches, and power in the kingdom he was about to establish. It appears, therefore, that Jesus frequently experienced almost as much difficulty in retaining them, as in convincing the rebellious Jews by his miracles and fine arguments. The measure of their appetite, and well-being, was at this time the only rule of their faith. To prevent their

murmurs, and familiarize them with the frugal life which our missionary saw he would be obliged to make them lead, perhaps for a long time to come, he pronounced an oration on true happiness: it is the one known by the name of the sermon on the mount, and related by St Matthew, chap. v.

According to our orator, true happiness consists in *poverty of spirit*, that is, in ignorance, and contempt of a proud knowledge, which bids us exercise our reason, and strips man of that blind submission, which is necessary to induce him to submit to a guide. In a word, on this occasion, Jesus preaches to his apostles and the surrounding multitude a stupidity very useful to his views, a pious docility which implicitly credits every thing without examination; and shews them, that the kingdom of heaven will be the reward of this happy disposition. Such is the sense which the church has always given to the words of Jesus, *Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

Among the apostles, there were some whose passionate dispositions might have been prejudicial to the progress of the sect: it may in general be presumed, that rough men, devoid of education, have repulsive manners. Jesus demonstrates to them the necessity of meekness, civility, and patience, in order to gain proselytes and attain his ends; he recommends to them moderation and toleration as the certain means of insinuating themselves into the minds of men, and thriving in the world; in short, as the surest way of making

conquests.—This is the true sense of these words;
Happy are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

Wishing afterwards to inspire them with courage, and console them for their miserable situation, he gives them to understand, that to live in tears is felicity and an infallible method of expiating iniquity. He promises them that their vexations shall not endure evermore; that their tears shall be dried up; that their misery shall terminate, and that their hunger shall be appeased. These consolations and promises were indispensibly necessary to fortify the apostles against every accident, which might befall them in the course of their enterprises, and in the retinue of a chief destitute of riches and power, and incapable of procuring to himself and others any of the comforts of existence.

Jesus, with a view, no doubt, of sweetening the lot of his apostles, recommends compassion to the listening multitude; that is, exhorts them to shew their pity, whereof he himself, as well as his gang, stood in the greatest need. It is indeed readily perceived, that the Messiah felt the most imperious necessity to preach up charity to his auditors; he himself lived only on alms; his subsistence and success depended obviously on the generosity of the public, and the benefactions of the good souls who hearkened to his lessons.

The preacher recommends peace and concord, dispositions indispensibly necessary to a new born sect weak and persecuted; but this necessity ceased to o-

perate, when the sect had attained strength enough to dictate the law.

He afterwards fortifies his disciples against the persecutions which they were to experience; he addresses himself to their self-love, spurring them on by motives of honour: *Ye are, says he, the salt of the earth, the light of the world.* He gives them to understand, that they are the *successors of the prophets*, men so much respected by the Jews; and to share in whose glory they ought to expect the same crosses, which their illustrious predecessors heretofore experienced. In fine, he calls on them to regard it as a felicity, and most worthy of heavenly rewards, to be hated, persecuted, contemned, traduced, and in short to be deprived of all which is commonly regarded as constituting the well-being of men.

After having thus fortified his disciples against the misfortunes wherewith their mission would be accompanied, he addressed himself more particularly to the people. He presented to them a new morality, which so far from being totally repugnant to that of the Jews, could easily be reconciled with it. Things were not as yet sufficiently matured for abrogating entirely the law of Moses: too great changes alarm mankind. A missionary, still feeble, must at first confine himself to reforming abuses, without seeking to probe to the bottom.—Jesus, therefore, wisely contented himself with shewing, that the law was faulty in some places, and that he proposed to perfect it. Such is the language which all reformers employ.

Jesus accordingly expressly declares to the people, that *he was not come to destroy, but to fulfil the law*: and he also affirms, that in heaven, ranks will be fixed according to the rigorous observance of all its articles. He insinuates, however, to his audience, that neither they, nor their doctors, understand any of that law, which they believed, they faithfully practised. He undertakes therefore to explain it, and as all reformers pretend to puritanical austerity, and to a supernatural and more than human perfection, he went beyond the law. The following is the substance of his marvellous instructions.

"You have," said he, "heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be punished with death; but I say unto you, that it is necessary to extend this prohibition and punishment even to wrath, seeing it is wrath which pushes one on to put his fellow creature to death.—You would punish adultery, only when it is committed: but I tell you, that in this article, desire alone renders one as culpable as fact. You perhaps will answer, that man is not the master of his passions and desires, and that he can hardly resist them; I agree with you on this; you have not any power, even on the hairs of your head. (1) The penances, sacrifices, and expiations, which your priests impose on you, are not capable to procure the remission of your sins; Behold then the only means of preventing them or making reparation for them. Has your eye, or any other of your members, solicited you to commit iniquity? Cut

" off that member, or pull out that eye, and throw it
 " from you; for it is more expedient, that one of your
 " members should perish, than the whole body be
 " thrown into hell-fire. If Moses, inspired by the
 " Divinity, had known this hell, or place destined for
 " your suffering eternal punishments, he would not
 " have failed to menace you with it; but he was ab-
 " solutely ignorant of the important dogma of another
 " life; he has therefore spoken only of the present, to
 " which he has limited your misfortunes, or your fe-
 " licity. Had it not been for this, he would not have
 " neglected to acquaint you with a fact, so well calcu-
 " lated to inspire you with fear, and render life insup-
 " portable. (2) You use too freely the permission
 " of divorce; the least disgust makes you repudiate
 " your wives; but I tell you, that you ought to repu-
 " diate them only, when you have surprised them in
 " adultery. It is too cruel to stone one for this fault;
 " we ought to have respect for the weakness of the
 " sex." It appears, that Jesus, whose birth as we have
 " seen, was very equivocal, had particular reasons for
 " wishing, that adultery should be treated with more in-
 " dulgence. Independently of Mary his mother, from
 " whom Joseph was very probably separated, our preach-
 " er had in his train dames, whose conduct had been
 " every thing but irreproachable, anterior to their con-
 " version. (3) Besides, the indulgence which he preach-
 " ed, must have gained him the hearts of all the ladies
 " in his auditory.

The Messiah continues nearly in these terms; " God
 " has promised you of old times blessings, prosperi-

"ties and glory; but he has changed his intention,
 "and revoked these promises; as you were almost al-
 "ways, and still are, the most unhappy, the most fool-
 "ish, and most despised people on earth, you ought to
 "suspect, that these pompous promises were mere alle-
 "gories. You ought, therefore, to have an abject
 "and mortifying morality, conformable to your ge-
 "nius, your situation and your misery. If it does not
 "procure to you welfare, in this world, you ought to
 "hope, that it will render you more happy in another.
 "The humiliations, you ought to make, are the cer-
 "tain means of attaining one day that glory, which
 "hitherto neither you nor your fathers have ever been
 "able to acquire. When therefore a person shall give
 "you a blow on one cheek, offer instantly the other:
 "(4). Do not go to law — lawyers will ruin you;
 "and besides, the poor are always in the wrong when
 "opposed to the rich. Give to whoever asks of you,
 "and refuse nothing you possess; it is by relying on
 "the punctual practice of this important precept that
 "I send my disciples into the world without money or
 "provisions."

"I do not give you any description of paradise—it
 "is sufficient for you to know in gross, that you will be
 "there perfectly happy. But to get there, it is neces-
 "sary to be more than men; it is necessary to love your
 "enemies, render good for evil, preserve no remem-
 "brance of the cruellest outrages, bless the hand that
 "strikes you, and not speak one silly word, for one on-
 "ly will suffice to precipitate you into hell. Have
 "a pleasant aspect when you shall fast; but especially

"live without foresight—Amass nothing, for fear of
 "exciting the wrath of my Father. Think not of
 "to-morrow—live at random, like the birds, that ne-
 "ver think of sowing, gathering, or accumulating pro-
 "visions. Detach yourselves from all things here be-
 "low—seek the kingdom of God, which I and my
 "disciples will sell you for your charities. This con-
 "duct cannot fail to plunge you into misery; but
 "then you shall beg in your turn. God will provide
 "for your wants—ask, and it shall be given you. Do
 "not the beggars find, agreeably to our divine pre-
 "cepts, wherewith to live, at the expence of the sim-
 "pletons who labour? (5) My disciples and I, are we
 "not an example, evincing, that even without toil,
 "one may draw himself out of scrapes, and never pe-
 "rish by hunger? If our manner of living appears not
 "to agree with my language, I warn you that you
 "must not judge any person, nor condemn your mas-
 "ters and doctors. Do not intermeddle with state
 "affairs;—that cure is reserved for me, and those in
 "whom I confide. The master is superior to the
 "disciple—it is to me in particular you ought to lis-
 "ten. If you call me your master, it is necessary to
 "do what I desire you. The practice of my morali-
 "ty is difficult, and even impossible, to many persons;
 "but the broad and easy way conducts to perdition;
 "and to enter into heaven, it is necessary to be as
 "perfect as my heavenly Father, that is, as the Divi-
 "nity himself.

"Moreover, I must warn you against my enemies,
 "or those who shall preach to you a doctrine contra-

“ry to mine. Treat them as wolves; they are false
 “prophets—shew them no indulgence: for it is not
 “to them that you ought to be humane, tolerant, and
 “pacific.”

In the course of his discourse, Jesus taught them a short form of prayer, known to Christians by the name of *The Lord's prayer*. (6) Altho' the Son of God may have shewn himself on this occasion the declared enemy of long prayers, the Christian church is full of pious sluggards, who, in spite of his decision, believe, they cannot perform any thing more agreeable to God than spending their whole time in mumbling prayers in a very low tone, or singing them in a very high one, and frequently in a language they do not understand. It appears, that, in this, as in many other things, the church has rectified the ideas of its divine founder.

St Matthew informs us, that the discourse, of which we have given the substance, transported the people with admiration at the doctrine of Jesus, for he instructed them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.—The latter, perhaps, spoke in a more simple fashion, and consequently less admired by the vulgar, whose wonderment is incited in proportion to their inability to comprehend, or practise, the precepts given them. Thus the sermon of Jesus had not, at that time, any contradictors. It has however since then furnished ample scope for dispute to our casuists and theologians; they have subtilly distinguished between things which were merely of *counsel*, and those of *pre-*

cept, that is, which ought rigorously to be observed. In fact, it was soon felt, that the sublime morality of the Son of God did not suit mankind, and its literal observance became necessarily destructive to society. —It was, therefore, requisite to abate it, and recur to that marvellous distinction, in order to shelter the honour of the divine legislator, and reconcile his fanatical morality with the wants of the human race.

Moreover, this discourse presents difficulties, which will always appear very embarrassing to persons accustomed to reflect on what they read. They find, that it is ridiculous and false to say, a law is accomplished, when it is proposed and permitted to violate it, and add or retrench the most essential points. Since the time of Jesus, why has that law been completely abrogated by St Paul and his adherents, who, as we have seen, seceded from the Christian partizans of Judaism? Why do Christians entertain at present so much horror at that same Judaism, except indeed when the privileges and pretensions of the clergy are in question—articles on which our Christian priests are very judaical, and which they have prudently borrowed from Leviticus; all to supply the neglect of Christ, who in his gospel was not sufficiently attentive either to their temporal interests, *divine rights*, or sacred hierarchy. By what law do the inquisitors (if Christians) in Portugal and Spain burn those who are accused, or convicted, of having judaised, that is, of having observed the usages of a law, which Jesus has declared, that he did not wish to *abolish*, but to *fulfil*? By what law have Christian doctors dispensed with

circumcision, and permit themselves to eat pork, bacon, pudding, hare, &c. Why has Sunday, or the day of the sun among Pagans, been substituted for Sabbath or Saturday?

2dly, It is held unjust to punish in the same manner a man in a passion and a murderer. One may be in a passion, and restrain himself, or repair afterwards the injury done; but one cannot restore life to a man, whom he has deprived of it.

3dly, The restriction of divorce to the single case of adultery is a law very hard, and very prejudicial to the happiness of married persons. This precept compels a man to live with a woman, who in other respects may be odious to him. Besides, it is generally very difficult to convict a female of adultery; she usually uses precaution to avoid conviction on account of her debaucheries. Is it not very grievous, and even dangerous, to live with a person who occasions continual suspicions?

4thly, It is absurd to make a crime of desire, especially without supposing the *liberty* of man; but Jesus is not very explicit on that important article; on the contrary, from the train of his discourse he appears to recognize the *necessity* of man, who has no authority over a single hair of his head. St Paul, his apostle, in many places declares in like manner against the liberty of man, whom he compares with a vessel in the hands of a potter. St Augustin says, that "man is not master of his thoughts."

5thly, It is a very strange remedy to cut off or pluck out a member every time it is an occasion of scandal or sin: it contradicts the precept not to make an attempt on one's life. Origen is blamed by the Christians themselves for having performed an operation, which he no doubt judged necessary for preserving his chastity. It is not through the members, but the inclination, that a person sins: it is therefore absurd to say, that one shall escape damnation of the body by depriving himself of a member. What would become of so many prelates and ecclesiastical libertines, if to appease the lusts of the flesh, and make reparation for scandal, they should take it into their heads to follow the counsel of Jesus?

6thly, The suppression of a just defence of one's person and rights, against an aggressor or unjust litigant, is to overturn the laws of every society. It is to open a door to iniquities and crimes, and render useless the exercise of justice. By such maxims a people could not exist ten years.

7thly, The counsel, or precept, to possess nothing, amass nothing, and think not of the morrow, would be very prejudicial to families. A father ought to provide a subsistence for his children. These maxims can suit sluggards only, certain of living at the expence of the public; that is to say, priests and monks, who hold labour in horror.

8thly, It is now easy to perceive, that the promises made the Jews by the mouth of Moses, inspired by the

Divinity, have not been verified literally, and are only allegorical. But it was not from the Son of God that the Jews should have learned this fatal truth. Once deceived by the Divinity, they ought to have dreaded being again deceived by another envoy. Like Jesus, Moses had made promises; like Jesus, Moses had confirmed his promises and million by miracles; yet these promises have been found deceptive, and merely allegorical; this idea ought to have created presumptions dangerous to the promises of Christ. (7)

gibly, To say that it is necessary to be *poor in spirit*, and to say afterwards that to attain heaven it is necessary to be perfect as the heavenly Father is perfect, is to make God a stupid being, to afford to Atheists a solution for all the evil they perceive in nature; in fine, it is to pretend, that to enter paradise, one must be a fool. But has man the power of being spiritual or poor in spirit, reasonable or foolish, believing or unbelieving? Is not the holy stupidity of faith a gift, which God grants only to whom he will? Is it not unjust to damn people of understanding?

Lastly, In this fine sermon Jesus recommends to beware of *false prophets*, and says, that it is by their works one shall know them.—Yet, as we have seen, the priests tell us, *we ought to do as they say, without imitating what they do*, when we find their conduct little conformable to the maxims they preach.—It was necessary, therefore, to give us another sign than works, whereby to recognize false prophets, or else the faith-

ful will often be reduced to believe, that the clergy are provided only with lying prophets.

It is in this manner unbelievers argue, that is to say, all those who have not received from heaven *poorness of spirit*, so necessary for not perceiving the want of inference, false principles, and numberless inconveniences, which most directly result from the morality of Jesus. This morality appears a divine *chef d'œuvre* to docile Christians illuminated by faith; and it was much admired by those who heard it delivered. We know not, however, if many of the auditors were so affected by it as to follow it literally; to admire a doctrine, and believe it true and divine, is a thing much more easy than to practise it. Many persons set a higher value on evangelical virtues, which are sublime in theory, than on the human virtues, which reason commands us to practise.

It is not then surprising, that the supernatural and marvellous morality of Jesus was applauded by those who heard it. It was addressed to paupers, the dregs of the people, and the miserable. An austere stoical morality must please the wretched; it transforms their actual situation into virtue; it flatters their vanity, makes them proud of their misery, hardens them against the strokes of fortune, and persuades them that they are much more valuable than the rich, who maltreat them, and that the Deity, who delights in seeing men suffer, prefers the wretched to those who enjoy felicity.

On the other hand, the vulgar imagine, that those who possess the faculty of restraining their passions, despising what men seek after, and depriving themselves of what excites the desires of others, are extraordinary beings, not only agreeable to God, but endowed by him with preternatural grace, without which they would be incapable of the exertions they are seen to make. Thus a harsh morality, which seems to proceed from insensibility, pleases the rabble, imposes on the ignorant, and is sufficient to excite the admiration of the simple. It is not even displeasing to persons placed in more happy situations, who admire the doctrine, well assured of finding the secret to elude the practice of it, by the assistance of their indulgent guides; there is only a small number of fanatics who follow it literally.

Such were the dispositions which must have induced so many people to receive the doctrine of Jesus. His maxims have hatched a multitude of obstinate martyrs, who, in the hope of opening to themselves a road to heaven, have set torments and afflictions at defiance. The same maxims produced penitents of every kind, solitaries, Anchorites, Cenobites and monks, who, in emulation of each other, have rendered themselves illustrious in the eyes of nations by their austerities, voluntary poverty, a total renunciation of the comforts of nature, and a continual struggle against the gentlest and most lawful inclinations. (8) The counsels and precepts of the gospel have inundated nations with a vast number of madmen, enemies of themselves and perfectly useless to others.—These wonderful men were ad-

admired, respected, and revered as saints by their fellow-citizens, who, themselves deficient in grace or enthusiasm necessary for imitating them, or following faithfully the counsels of the Son of God, had recourse to their intercession, in order to obtain pardon for their sins, and indulgence from the Almighty, whom they suppose irritated at the impossibility wherein they find themselves of following literally the precepts of his Son. In fine, it is easy to perceive, that these precepts, rigorously observed would drag society into total ruin—for society is supported only by reason; that most Christians, admiring the doctrine of the Son of God as divine, dispense with practising it, and follow the propensity of nature, even at the risk of being damned.

Jesus in the gospel menaces with eternal punishment those who shall not fulfil his precepts. This frightful doctrine was not contradicted in the assembly, the superstitious love to tremble; those who threaten them most, are the most eagerly listened to. This was undoubtedly the time for establishing firmly the dogma of the *spirituality* and *immortality* of the soul. The Son of God ought to have explained to these Jews, but little acquainted with this matter, how a part of man could suffer in hell, whilst another part was rotting in the earth. But it appears, that our preacher was not acquainted with any of the dogmas which his church has since taught. He had not clear ideas of spirituality; he speaks of it only in a very obscure manner: "Fear," says he, in one place, "him who can throw both body and soul into hell,"—words which must have appeared unintelligible in a language, in which the

soul was taken for the blood or animating principle.

(9) It was not till a long time after Jesus, and when some Platonists had been initiated in Christianity, that the spirituality and immortality of the soul were converted into dogmas. Before their time the Jews and Christians had only vague notions on that important matter. We find, in fact, doctors in the first ages speaking to us of God and the soul as material substances, more subtle indeed than ordinary bodies. (10) It was reserved for latter metaphysicians to give us such sublime ideas of mind, that our limited understandings are bewildered when employed on them.

CHAPTER ELEVENTH.

ACTIONS AND PARABLES OF JESUS.--ENTERPRISE OF HIS RELATIONS AGAINST HIM.--JOURNEY OF JESUS TO INAZARETH, AND THE SUCCESS HE HAD THERE.

ALTHO' the obduracy of the doctors of the law and principal men among the Jews, created continual obstacles to the success which Christ had promised himself, he did not lose courage; he had again recourse to prodigies, the certain means of captivating the populace, on whom he plainly perceived he behoved to found his hopes. This people were very subject to diseases of the skin, such as leprosy and the like cutaneous disorders. No doubt can be entertained on this point, when we consider the precautions which the law of Moses ordains against these infirmities. To establish his reputation the more, Christ resolved to undertake the cure of this disgusting disease, with which his countrymen were infected.

According to St Luke, a leper came, and prostrated himself at the feet of Jesus, and adored him, saying, that he had heard him spoken of as a very able man, and that he could cure him, if he was inclined.

Forthwith Jesus did but stretch forth his hand, and the leprosy disappeared. (1) Hitherto Christ had ordered every one he had cured to go and present themselves to the priests, in order to offer them the gift prescribed in such cases; (2) but on this occasion probably he thought that he would reconcile them by this mark of deference. He therefore exacted of the cured leper, that he would satisfy the ordinance of the law; but at the same time recommended secrecy as to the physician's name, — a secret which was not better preserved by him than by others. Jesus forgot that it was not sufficient to impose silence on the persons he cured, but that it was likewise necessary to lay a restraint on all the tongues of the spectators; unless it is supposed that these miracles were performed with shut doors, and witnessed by the Saviour's disciples only; or, indeed, supposed, that they were not performed at all.

Meanwhile, the leper's indiscretion was the cause why Jesus, according to St Mark, no longer ventured to appear in the city. (3) The priests seem to have taken in ill mood the cure he had performed: He therefore withdrew into the desert, (4) where the more he was followed, the more he buried himself in concealment. It was in vain that in this situation the people desired to hear him; it was in vain, that the sick, who ran after him, requested their cure; he no

(1) St Luke v. 12. St Matt. viii. 2 St Mark i, 40

(2) Levit. xiv. and St Matt. viii, 4

(3) St Mark i, 45

(4) St Luke v, 16

longer suffered that marvellous virtue, calculated to cure every disorder, to exhale from him.

After having wandered for some time in the desert, ruminating on his affairs, he reappeared at Capernaum. The domestic of a Roman centurion, much beloved by his master, was at the point of death from an attack of the palsy. (5). This Pagan believed that Jesus could easily cure his slave; but instead of presenting him to Christ as he ought to have done, he deputed some Jewish senators, whom he seems to have brought on purpose from Jerusalem. However disagreeable this commission might be to persons whom the centurion had no right to command, and who by that step seemed to acknowledge the mission of Jesus, our senators performed it.—Christ, flattered with seeing an idolater apply to him, set out immediately; but the centurion sent some of his people to inform Jesus, that he was not worthy of the honour thus intended him by entering his house; and that to cure his valet it was sufficient for Christ to speak one word. Jesus was delighted with this; he declared, that *he had not found so much faith in Israel*; and with one word, if the Gospel may be believed, performed the cure. He afterwards gave the Jews to understand, that if they persisted in their hardness of heart, (the only disease which the Son of God could never cure, although he had come for that purpose,) the idolatrous nations would be substituted in their stead in the inheritance of heaven, and that God, notwithstanding his promises, would abandon his

(5) St Matt. viii. St Luke vii.

ancient friends for ever and for ever. The gospel, however, does not tell us, whether this centurion so full of faith was himself converted.

The day after this cure Jesus departed from Capernaum, and arrived in good time at Nain, a small town in Galilee, about twenty leagues distant from the former; this proves that Christ was a great walker. By good luck he got there in time to perform an excellent miracle. A poor widow had lost her son: They were already carrying him away to be buried; the disconsolate mother followed the funeral procession, accompanied by a great multitude. Jesus, moved with compassion, approaches the bier, and lays his hand on it. Immediately those who carry it stop.—*Young man!* says Christ, speaking to the deceased, *I say to thee, Arise.* Forthwith he who was dead sat up. This miracle terrified all the assistants, but converted nobody. It is proper to remark, that St Luke alone relates this transaction, in which, if better verified, one might justly suspect, that the disconsolate mother held secret intelligence with the Theuma-turge. (6)

Some historians have made John Baptist live to this period; others make him die much earlier. Here St Matthew and St Luke introduce the disciples of the precursor, on purpose to question Jesus on the part of their master. "Art thou he that was to come, or look we for another?" The Mes-

(6) St Luke, vii. 11--17.

fish in reply works miracles in their presence, cures the sick, casts out devils, and gives sight to the blind ; after which he says to John's deputies, "Go and relate " to John what you have heard and seen." (7) It was on this occasion that Jesus pronounced the eulogy of John. He had, as we have seen in chapter fourth of this history, his reasons for doing so. "Amongst " all these," says he, "that are born of women, verily " I say unto you, there is not a greater than John Baptist." Our panegyrist profits afterwards by the circumstance to fall on the Pharisees and doctors, who alike rejected both his baptism and John's. He compares these unbelievers to "Children sitting in the " market place, and calling to one another, we have " piped to you, and you have not danced ; we have " chanted funeral airs, and ye have not weeped." It is not related, whether this jargon converted the doctors. (8)

After this our speech-maker compares his own conduct with that of the precursor. "John," says he, "came neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and " you say he hath a devil. I drink, eat, and love " good cheer, yet you reject me also, under pretence " that I am a drunken sot and a debauchee ; and that I " frequent the company of men and women of bad reputation." But he gave the populace to understand, that their suffrage was sufficient for him ; as it were telling them, "I am certain of you, you are too

(7) St Matt. xi. 2. St Luke vii, 18—22.

(8) St Matt. xi. 11. St Luke vii. 32.

"*poor in spirit* to perceive of yourselves the irregularity of my conduct—my wonders especially pass with you; you should not reflect; are then you the true children of *wisdom, which will be justified by you.*" (9) *

After this harrangue, a Pharisee, who, to judge of him by his conduct, had been noways moved by Jesus, invited the orator, however, to dinner; but he used Christ in the most unpolite manner. He did not cause his feet to be bathed, nor did he present perfumes, according to the established custom of the Jews towards every person of however little distinction. Although the self-love of Jesus might be offended at this omission, he did not decline sitting down at table; but while he was eating, a woman of a bad life bathed his feet with her tears, wiped them with her beautiful hair, and thereafter anointed them with a most precious perfume. The Pharisee did not comprehend the mystery; as stupid as incredulous, he conjectured, that Jesus did not know the profession of the female, but he was grossly deceived: the courtesan in question and all her family were intimately connected with Christ. St John informs us, that she was called Mary Magdalane, and that she was the sister of Martha and Lazarus, folks well known to Jesus, and who, as we will very soon see, held a regular correspondence with him; in particular it appears, that Magdalane

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(9) St Luke vii. 34,---5.

entertained the most tender sentiments for the Son of God.

This action of the courtezan did not disconcert the Saviour; he explained her love, the cares she rendered him, and the kisses with which she loaded him, in a mystical and spiritual sense; and assuming the tone of one inspired, he sent her away, telling her that her sins were forgiven on account of the love she had displayed. St Luke informs us in the chapter following, that Jesus had delivered this lady of *seven devils* — a service which doubtless merited all her gratitude: Be that as it may, Christ employed this indirect way of shewing the Pharisee the incivility of his behaviour to a man of his kidney.

The relations of Jesus informed of the noise he made, and suspecting that he could not lead a very pure life in the midst of the gentry he frequented; or fearing, that his conduct in the end would draw him into some unlucky affair, went from Nazareth to Capernaum on purpose to seize him, and cause him be confined. There is reason to believe, that they were afraid of being involved in his disgrace; besides they chose rather to charge themselves with the correction of their kinsman, than see him delivered up to justice, an event which they saw behoved, soon or late, to happen. These kinsmen therefore circulated a rumour, that Jesus was a fool, whose brain was disordered. Jesus, informed of their arrival, and the motive of their journey, kept close in his quarters, and had a prodigy in reserve for the moment they should appear. The

people who had got a hint of this, or were told beforehand by the emissaries of the Messiah, repaired in a croud to him. As soon as the relations appeared, a blind and dumb man possessed with a devil was brought: Jesus exorcised him, the possessed was delivered, and the people were in admiration.

The doctors beheld with pain the credulity of the rabble, and foresaw the consequences of it.—The kinsmen of Jesus, little affected by this miracle, promised to the doctors to use all their efforts to deliver up to them so dangerous a man.—He is a forcerer, said some; he is a prophet, said others; he must prove it, said a third; and notwithstanding the great miracle he had performed, others added, *Let us ask of him a sign in the air*: “Good God!” said the Nazarenes, “he is neither forcerer nor prophet; we know him better than any body; he is a poor lad, whose brain is disordered.”

All these speeches were related to Jesus; he answered them by parables and invectives, and defended himself from the charge of being a wizard, saying, it was absurd to maintain, that he cast out devils by the power of devils. As to the imputation of folly, he repelled it, affirming, that whoever should attack him on the score of understanding could not expect the remission of his sins, either in this world or in the other. This undoubtedly is what must be understood by *the sin against the Holy Ghost*.

Nevertheless the mid-way course of demanding a

sign was followed ; for this purpose a députation was sent to Jesus ; but instead of a sign in the air he gave them one in the water. He referred our inquisitive folks to Jonah, and told them they should have no other ; for added he, "As Jonas was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale, so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." The Jews, who were neither wizards nor prophets, comprehended none of this language. Jesus, whom miracles cost nothing, when every thing was arranged for performing them, did not risk himself by working them *impromptu*, or in the presence of those, whom he judged acute enough to examine them.—On this occasion he paid off with an unintelligible answer these poor Jews, whom he calculated on converting to himself for ever.

This refusal to perform a prodigy in the air, creates a belief, that our gentleman declined the contest : raillery was introduced : the Son of God got into a passion, and launched prophetic invectives against the Jews. He compared the conduct of the queen of Sheba with theirs ; boasted of his being greater and wiser than Solomon, and threatened to deprive them of the light which he shed in their country, and which however he would have spread much farther, if he had deigned to consent to give the sign they demanded.—But there is reason to believe, our Messiah felt, that a sign in the air was much more difficult than all those he made on earth, where he was better able to arrange matters than aloft in the atmosphere, a region in which there was no body to concert with.

Meanwhile Jesus' mother had joined her other children and relations, in order to soothe and engage them to desist from their pursuits, but could not prevail on them. They persisted in the design of taking up our adventurer; but as they could not penetrate thro' the multitude, and come close up to him, they sent notice they were there. "Behold," said some one to Jesus, "thy mother and thy brethren, who seek thee."—Christ knowing the object of their visit, which he was no ways eager to receive, abjured such froward relations; "Who is my mother, and who are my brethren," said he; after which, stretching forth his hand towards the people, "*Behold,*" added he, "*my mother and my brethren;* I know no other kinsmen than those who hearken to my word, and put it in practice." The people, flattered with the preference, took our gentleman under their protection, and the attempt of his family was thus turned to their confusion. (10)

Escaped from this perilous adventure, our hero, afraid of being caught unawares, or mistrusting the constancy of the populace, who, notwithstanding the pleasure they found in seeing him perform his juggles, might desert him at last, our hero, I say, thought proper to provide for his safety by leaving the town. (11) He accordingly departed with his twelve apostles, the ladies of his train, Mary his mother, Jane and Magdalane, *who assisted the company with their property.*

(10) St Mat. xii. 46. St Mark iii. 12. St Luke viii. 19.

(11) St Matt. xiii. 1.

There is reason to believe, that the last, who before she was with Jesus had made gain of her charms, was rich in jewels and ready money. This rendered her conversion of great importance to the sect, and especially to Jesus, who, without cruelty, could not refuse to repay so much love with a little return.

The persecution which Jesus experienced, excited an interest in his behalf, and it would seem, procured him greater countenance. A multitude of people, impelled by curiosity, went out of the towns and hamlets in the environs to see him, as soon as they knew the road he had taken. Not to be crushed by the crowd, he resolved again to go on board a vessel; and having accordingly done so, he began to preach from the ship; but recollecting the scrapes which his former sermons had brought him into, he did not think it prudent to explain himself so clearly; he, therefore, preferred speaking in parables, always susceptible of a double meaning. It may be believed, the explication of these enigmas was circulated by means of the apostles, to whom Jesus gave it in charge. (12)

One day chagrined at his little success, he flatly avowed that he had changed his resolution as to the Jews, and meant to abandon their conversion. The reason for doing so he expressed to them in parables; "that seeing," said he, "they may not perceive, and "hearing they may not understand, lest at any time

(12) St Mark iv. 10.

"they should be converted, and their sins should be forgiven them." (13)

It must be owned, that it is very difficult to reconcile here the conduct of God. Were we not afraid of committing sacrilege by hazarding conjectures, as men, on the conduct of Jesus, might it not be presumed, that at first he had the design of giving laws to the Jews, but perceiving afterwards his little success, as he began to be disparaged in that country, he resolved to seek his fortune elsewhere, and gain other subjects? What he entrusted to his disciples in this secret conference, appears to have been for the purpose of preparing them for this change; but his punishment prevented all his designs, which were not executed till a long time after by his apostles, who no doubt carefully treasured up this conference.

We will not enter into a detail of all the parables which Jesus employed in communicating his marvellous doctrine to the Jews, or preaching without being understood. Such a discussion would become very tiresome; we therefore advise those, who may have taste for such kind of apologues, to read rather those of Esop or La Fontaine, which they will find more amusing and more instructive than the fables of Christ. Those however who wish to consult the parables or apologues of the gospel, will find them in the places following.

The parable of the *sower* is found in St Luke, chap. viii. ver. 5.

The parable of the *concealed lamp*, *ibid.* chap. viii.
ver. 16.

The parable of the *rare*, in St Matt. chap. xiii. ver.
24.

The parable of the *seed*, in St Mark, chap. iv. ver.
26.

The parable of the *grain of mustard*, in St Matt.
chap. xiii. ver. 31.

The parable of the *leaven*, in St Matt. chap. xiii.
ver. 33.

The parable of the *hidden treasure*, *ibid.* chap. xiii.
ver. 44.

The parable of the *pearl*, *ibid.* chap. xiii. ver. 45.

The parable of the *net cast into the sea*, *ibid.* ver.
47.

The parable of the *father of the family*, *ibid.* ver.
52.

Some time after this, Jesus, informed that his brothers and cousins were not at home at the time, went to Nazareth accompanied with his apostles. He perhaps wanted to convince his countrymen, that he was not such a fool as was reported. Perhaps he hoped to confer with his family, and gain them over to

his side. He arrives on the Sabbath, and repairs to the synagogue: immediately the priest very politely presents him with a book; he opens it, and stumbles precisely on this passage of Isaiah: "The spirit of the Lord has rested upon me, and therefore I am anointed to preach." Having shut the book he delivered it to the priest, and sat down; but did not neglect to apply to himself this passage of the prophet, where also mention is made of miracles and prodigies. There were present, either by chance or design, several Galileans, who having, been witnesses of the marvels he had performed among them the year preceding, did not hesitate to bear testimony in his favour. But the Nazarenes, who knew what to think of our gentleman, were shocked at his magisterial tone. "Is not this," said they to one another, "the carpenter, the son of Joseph the carpenter? Is not his mother called Mary? Are not his brethren and sisters with us? Whence then has he so much skill? How and by what means does he work the miracles related to us?"

Jesus, hearing these discourses, saw plainly that this was not the proper place for performing prodigies—But he wished that his inaction might be attributed to the evil dispositions of his countymen, who were surprised to hear the sagacity and power of a man vaunted of, whose conduct appeared to them very equivocal. "I see well," said Jesus to them, "that you apply to me the proverb, Physician, cure thyself; and that, to prove the truth of the marvels you have heard of me, you wish me to perform some of those fine legerdemains which I have

"elsewhere exhibited ; but I know I shall labour in vain in this city : I am too well convinced of the truth of the proverb, No man is a prophet in his own country." To justify himself, he employs examples, which would seem to throw a suspicion on the miracles of the prophets of the Old Testament, whom this proverb, even by itself, was calculated to make pass for knaves. Whatever opinion we may form of this, he cites the example of Elias, who among all the widows of Israel, did not find one more deserving of a miracle than her of Sarepta, a woman of the country of the Sidonians. In the days of Elias, Judea was overrun with lepers ; and yet the Prophet cured Naaman, who was a Syrian and an idolater, in preference to his countrymen.

This harrangue, which tended to insinuate the reprobation and perversity of the audience, put them into ill humour, and excited their rage so far, that they dragged the orator out of the synagogue, and led him away to the top of a mountain, with an intention to throw him down headlong ; but he had the good fortune to escape, and thus avoid the fate which was intended him in the place of his nativity.

St Matthew, speaking of this journey to Nazareth, says, that his Master did not perform there many miracles, on account of the unbelief of the inhabitants. But St Mark says positively, that he *could not do any*, which is still more probable. (14)

(14) Compare on this fact St Matt. xi. 11, St Mark vi. St Luke iv. and viii.

Our luminous interpreters and commentators believe, that Jesus escaped only by a miracle out of the hands of the Nazarenes. But would it have cost him more to perform a miracle in order to convert them, and thereby prevent their mischievous designs? This was all which was required of him, and then he would not have stood in need of performing a miracle in order to save himself, and place his person in security. Jesus never performed miracles but with certain loss; he always dispensed with working any when they would have been decisive.

CHAPTER TWELFTH.

MISSION OF THE APOSTLES---THE INSTRUCTIONS JESUS GAVE
THEM---MIRACLES WROUGHT BY HIM UNTIL THE
END OF THE SECOND YEAR OF HIS OWN
MISSION.

DISSATISFIED with his expedition to Nazareth, Jesus went to Upper Galilee, which had already been the theatre of his wonders. He found the inhabitants of that country in a disposition better adapted to his purpose. He perceived, however, that the necessity they were under of suspending their labour in order to come and hear him, kept a great number at home. This consideration obliged him to disperse his apostles by two and two in the province. Perhaps, also, Christ resolved on this dispersion, as he found his own sermons and prodigies did not gain proselytes enough. The continual enterprises of his enemies made him feel the necessity of encreasing his party.

It appears that Jesus had already sent several of his disciples on mission, retaining near himself his twelve apostles only; it may however be presumed, that these preachers were as yet mere novices; their labours were unsuccessful; and they found the devils so obstinate as to resist their exorcisms. Yet this want of success in what they pretended to, was owing solely to the weakness of their faith, and would seem to throw a

shade on the foresight and penetration of their divine master. Why did he uselessly send missionaries, whose dispositions were not sufficiently known to him? Besides, it belonged to him alone to bestow on them before-hand a necessary stock of faith for their journey.

Whatever opinion may be formed of this, there is reason for believing, that the apostles, who quitted not their master, saw him continually operating, enjoyed his confidence, and in a word, had faith from the first hand—the apostles, I say, were better qualified than the disciples to labour to the satisfaction of the public. Thus Jesus, fully resolved to make a desperate effort, renewed all their powers, and gave them his instructions. These were in substance as follows: “Every thing being well considered, do not go among the Gentiles, for our Jews will bring it as a crime against us, and will employ it as a reproach against me. It is true, I have already threatened to renounce them, but it is still necessary to make one attempt more; you will therefore preach to the Jews only. Repentance supposes sobriety and few wants; hence the inutility of riches. I have no money to give you, but strive to pick up for yourselves what you can; farther, Providence will provide for you; if he takes care of the sparrows, he will take care of you. Moreover expect to be ill received, reviled, and persecuted; but be of good courage, all is for the best. Silence is no longer requisite; preach openly and on the house-tops, what I have spoken to you in secret. Inform the world that I am the Messiah, the Son of David and the

" Son of God; we have no longer to observe discre-
 " tion; we must either conquer or die; away then
 " with pusillanimity.

" Although I send you forth as sheep in the midst
 " of wolves, explain to the good people that you are
 " under the safeguard of the Most High, who will
 " take a terrible revenge for the outrages offered you,
 " and liberally reward those who welcome you.—
 " You do not need to concert measures for supplying
 " your expences; it belongs to those whose souls you
 " are going to save, to provide for the wants of your
 " bodies; carry not therefore either gold, or silver,
 " or provision or two suits of raiment; take a good
 " cudgel, and depart in the name of the Lord.

" You will take care in your way to preach always,
 " that *the kingdom of heaven is at hand*. Speak of the
 " end of the world; this will intimidate women and
 " poltroons. On entering cities and villages, inform
 " yourselves underhånd of such credulous people, as
 " are very charitable and prepossessed in our favour.
 " You will salute them civilly; saying, *Peace be to*
 " *this house*. But the peace you bring must be only
 " *allegorical*, for my doctrine is calculated to create e-
 " very where trouble, discord, and division. Who-
 " ever would follow me must abandon father, mother,
 " kinsmen, and family; we want only fanatics and en-
 " thusiasts, who, attaching themselves wholly to us,
 " trample under foot every human consideration. I
 " came not to send peace, but a sword. As a like con-
 " duct might embroil you with your hosts, you will

"change your abode from time to time. Do not re-
 "ly on the power I have of raising the dead; the sa-
 "fest way for you is not to venture your being kill-
 "ed; shun therefore places where you shall find your-
 "selves menaced with persecution. Leave disobedi-
 "ent cities and houses, *shaking the dust from off your*
 "*feet.* Tell them, that they have incurred the pu-
 "nishment of Sodom and Gomorrah. Declare to
 "them in my name, that the divine vengeance is rea-
 "dy to make them sensible of their guilt, and that
 "the inhabitants of these cities will be less rigorously
 "punished than those who shall have the audacity to
 "resist your lessons. The great and last day is not
 "far off: I assure you, that you shall not have finish-
 "ed your tour thro' all the cities of Israel, before the
 "Son of man shall arrive. (1)

Such is the sense and spirit of the instructions
 which Jesus gave to his apostles. In charging them
 to divulge his secret, he gives them a commission,
 which, notwithstanding his omnipotence, he himself
 durst not execute. But it is a grand policy to have
 instruments to act; without exposing himself personally
 in the matter.

These bagatelles, however, do not merit to be no-
 ticed; one is more surprised to find the Son of God
 proclaiming peace and charity, and at the same time
 asserting, that he brings war and hatred. It is with-
 out doubt a God only who can reconcile these con-

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(1) St Mat. x. St Mark vi. St Luke ix.

traditions. It is besides unquestionable, that the apostles, and especially their successors in the sacred ministry, in preaching their gospel, have brought on the world troubles and divisions, unknown in all other preceding religions. The incredulous, who by the way refer here to the history of the church, find, that the *glad tidings*, which they came on purpose to announce to mankind, have plunged the human race into tears and blood.

It is obvious from his language, that Jesus charges people of property with the maintenance of his apostles. Their successors have taken sufficient advantage of this, and thro' it assumed an authority to exercise for so many ages the most cruel extortions on impoverished nations. Would not the Almighty have rendered his apostles more respectable by rendering them incapable of suffering, and exempted them from the wants of nature? There is reason to believe, that this would have given more weight to their sublime sermons and those of their infallible successors.

Critics maintain also, it was false to say near eighteen hundred years ago, that *the end of the world was near*, and more false still to affirm, that the great Judge should arrive before the apostles could have time to make the tour of the cities of Israel. It is true, theologists understand the prediction in the sense following; that the end of the world shall happen when all the Jewish cities, that is, when all the Jews shall be converted. Time will demonstrate, whether it be in that sense we ought to understand the words

of Jesus : meanwhile the world still remains, and does not appear to threaten ruin so soon.

It is likewise very probable, that, besides these public instructions, Jesus gave more particular ones to his apostles. They departed in the hope of charities, which they were to receive from Jews, of whom the greatest number were already in a state of reprobation, or damned *in petto* by Providence. Meanwhile Jesus altered his orders in part ; he reserved for himself the cities, and left the villages only to his apostles. (1)

They went accordingly here and there, calling out, "*Hearken to the glad tidings ; the world is near its end.*" "*Repent therefore, pray, fast, and give us money and provisions, for having acquainted you with this interesting secret.*" Moreover we are assured, that they cured several diseases by the application of a certain oil. They had doubtless done more excellent things still, but the *paraclete* (the comforter) was not yet come : maugre the instructions of the Son of God, the understanding of the apostles was not yet sufficiently brightened ; (2) for we do not find, that the missionaries, with their balsam and fine speeches, made many converts.

The incredulous are still much surpris'd to find, in the instructions of Christ to his apostles, an explicit order to labour only for the conversion of the Jews, and an express prohibition against preaching to the

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(2) St Luke, ix. 6. St Mat. xi. St Mark, vi. 12.

Gentiles. They maintain, that a righteous God could make no distinction of persons; that the common father of mankind must show an equal love to all his children; that it cost no more to the Almighty to convert and save all nations; that a God, who is friendly to one country only, is a God purely local, and cannot be the God of the universe; and that a God partial, exclusive, and unjust, who follows caprice alone in his choice, can be neither perfect, nor the model of perfection. In short, those who have not the happiness of being *sacredly* blinded by faith, can not comprehend, how the equitable and wise Lord of all the nations of the earth could cherish exclusively the Jewish people; his infinite prescience ought to have shown him, that his love and favours would be completely lost on this untractable people.

Our unbelievers remark, that it does not become the Son of God to exclaim, "Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes." Would it not have been wiser, to go and preach to cities so docile, where Christ was certain of success, than to persist in preaching to the Jews, as to whom he was certain of miscarrying?

Jesus, now left alone, went about preaching thro' many cities of Galilee; but deprived of the assistance of his dear confidants, he did not in these places work any wonders;

We have hitherto seen the magistrates and the great paying little attention to the conduct of Jesus; they, in all appearance, despised a man, whom they regarded as a vagrant, or a fool little to be feared. 'Tis true, it is said that some of Herod's officers were on watch along with the Pharisees to destroy him; but this combination had no success. After all, the new missionary could give umbrage solely to the Jewish priests and the doctors of the law, against whom he declaimed with the greatest indecorum. By this conduct he rendered himself very agreeable to the people, long before weary of the extortions of these public bloodsuckers, who without pity drained the nation, treated the poorer sort with disdain, and, as the parable of the priest and the Samaritan evinces, were destitute of charity. The priests and doctors were very numerous in Jerusalem; on which account the people in the capital, as we have seen, were less disposed than elsewhere to listen to our preacher, for there is reason to believe, that the priests were the true cause of the hatred and contempt entertained against him in this great city.

By a very singular contrariety, the most obscure interval in our hero's life was that wherein he acquired the greatest celebrity. Jesus was wholly unknown at the court of Herod; while at the head of his troop, and surrounded by multitudes, he chased away devils, gave sight to the blind and speech to the mute, expelled the sellers from the temple, and raised the dead. But while he leads a private life in Galilee,—when, during the mission of his apostles, he finds himself a-

lone and without followers, and content with preaching repentance, — it is then that his fame, penetrating even to the throne, excites in the monarch a desire to see him. According to St Luke, a ray of light strikes the heart of Herod; doubt fills his mind; “John,” said he, “have I caused to be beheaded, but “he must have risen from the dead, and therefore it “is, that so many miracles are performed by him; “but who should this be of whom I hear such great “things?” He must needs see him; and it appears, that for this purpose he sent for Jesus. (4)

If nature had given him unquestionable rights to the throne of Judea, we might believe, that these pretensions were his motives for not putting himself in the power of a prince, the usurper of his crown. But Jesus could not dissemble, that his birth was not too well established; he knew besides, that for a long time past the family of David had lost the sovereign power. We must therefore search for another motive for his refusing to see Herod; the more so, as the interview of the Son of God with him, would not only have contributed to the conversion of this prince and all his court, but even of all Judea, and perhaps of the whole Roman empire. A single miracle of consequence, performed before a court, acknowledged and attested by persons of high authority, would doubtless have been more effectual, than the suspected testimony of all the peasantry and vagabonds in Galilee. Far from complying with the request of Herod, and per-

(4) St Luke v. 7. &c. St Mark vi. 14. &c. St Matt. xiv. 1. &c.

forming so eminent a benefit. Jesus withdraws into a desert, as soon as he learns the prince's intention. (5) Christ, who often uttered the most terrible curses against such as rejected him, scorns the invitation of a sovereign, and flies into a desert, instead of labouring for his conversion. The Messiah, who made no difficulty in entering the house of a centurion to heal his slave, refuses to visit a monarch in order to cure his blindness, and bring back to himself all his subjects, for whom, he affirms, that he is specially sent!

Our theologians explain these contradictions by referring us to the inexplicable decrees of Providence. But the incredulous maintain, that Jesus, who well knew how to work wonders in the eyes of a simple populace, dared not expose himself before an enlightened court; and it must be owned, that the manner in which he comported himself before his judges, before whom he was afterwards constrained to appear, seems to strengthen this opinion.

Meanwhile, the mission of the apostles expired. — In a short time they had traversed Galilee; and it appears from the repast which Jesus soon after gives to a croud of people, that the preaching of his missionaries had procured an abundant harvest. Loaded with the alms of the Galileans, the apostles returned to their master, who, by degrees, again found himself incommoded by the multitude which flocked to him. —

(5) St Matt. xiv. 13.

To enjoy more liberty, the troop embarked on board a small vessel, which conveyed them and their master across the sea of Galilee. There, in a solitary place, the apostles gave an account of the success of their mission—they made arrangements for the future, and especially, secured their provisions in a place of safety.

Those who had seen Jesus embark, thought, perhaps, they were for ever to be deprived of the pleasure of seeing him perform wonders. They made the tour of the lake, and altho' on foot, reached the other side before Jesus arrived there in his vessel. He preached to them, wrought miracles and cured the diseased; and these labours lasted until the evening.—His disciples then advised him to send away the people from the desert place, that they might go in search of lodgings and victuals in the neighbouring villages. He made no reply on the article of lodging;—there were doubtless few persons in this multitude who were accustomed to sleep on down—besides, the nights were likely not cold in that season and climate. But, wishing to amuse himself with the embarrassment of those who spoke to him, and who might not know the resources which the collections of his apostles had procured, "It is not necessary," said he, "that they should go into the villages,—give them yourselves where to eat." "Think you so?" replied they,— "shall we go and buy two hundred penny-worth of bread, and give them to eat?"—Philip, who perhaps was not in the secret—(in important affairs, it was always Peter, James, and John, whom Jesus em-

ployed)—Philip, I say, represented to him the impossibility of finding enough bread to feed this multitude: Upon which Christ said to Peter, "See how many loaves you have." He found none at all—a circumstance the more singular, as, according to St Mark, they had withdrawn to this place "on purpose to eat."† Peter, without answering the question, said to his master,* "There is a young lad here, who has five barley loaves and two small fishes." Jesus ordered them to be brought, & made the multitude range themselves in companies of hundreds and of fifties.—From this arrangement it appeared that there were five thousand men, besides women and children.—When every one had taken his place on the grass, Jesus, according to the usage of the Jews, blessed the loaves and fishes, broke, and distributed them among the apostles, who gave thereof to the people as much as they desired; they likewise filled twelve baskets with the fragments‡ of this celebrated entertainment. The guests, penetrated with admiration, exclaimed, "This is of a truth a prophet, and that prophet who should come into the world"(6)—which, translated into ordinary language, means, The true Amphitryon is he who gives us our dinner. The apostles spoke not a word.

Some critics, founding on the impossibilities this miracle presents, have ventured to doubt the truth of it: as if the impossibility of things could prejudice the reality of a miracle, the essence of which is to

† St Matt. vi. 31.

(6) St Mark vi, 31---44 St Matt. xiv, 18, &c, and St John vi,

produce things impossible. Yet if attention is given to the following relation, drawn from the evangelists, who are not however very unanimous on particulars, we will find, that this miracle presents nothing impossible, if one is inclined to give any credit to the prudence of the Son of God, who on this occasion found, that he could not make a better use of the provisions amassed by his apostles, than to distribute them to a hungry multitude. By this act, he saw himself certain of gaining their favour. It may be, the crowd was not quite so numerous as is related. Besides, our apostles, in passing to the opposite shore, might have thrown their nets with sufficient success to furnish fish for the company assembled. This meal must have appeared miraculous to persons who knew that Jesus had no fortune, and lived on alms. We accordingly find, that the people wanted to proclaim king the person who had so sumptuously regaled them. This entertainment no doubt recalled to their mind the idea of a Messiah, under whose government abundance was to reign. No more was requisite to induce a handful of miserales to believe, that the preacher, who by a miracle fed them so liberally, must be the extraordinary man the nation expected.

This great miracle then will become very probable by supposing, that the apostles in their collection had received a large quantity of bread. They amused themselves, as has been observed, with fishing, while they crossed the lake; Jesus tipt them the wink; when evening was come, things were disposed without the

observations of the people, who were thus fed with provisions amassed by means very natural.

Although the Galileans wanted to proclaim Christ king, he did not judge it proper to accept the honour, which he found himself for the present incapable of supporting. His exhausted provisions did not suffer him to undertake the entertaining frequently so many guests, at his own expence; and, although this conduct, much more than all his other miracles, would have gained him the affections of the beggars, idlers, and vagabonds of the country, the necessity of his affairs forced him not to recur to it.

Thus Jesus crowned the second year of his mission with an action well adapted to conciliate the love of the people, and at the same time give uneasiness to the magistrates. This stroke of eclat must doubtless have alarmed persons in power, who perceived that the affair might become very serious, especially considering the intention the Galileans had displayed of proclaiming our adventurer king. The priests probably profited by these dispositions in order to destroy Christ, who at all times appeared anxious to gain the populace, on purpose to aid him afterwards in subduing the great. This project might have succeeded, if Judea, as in times past, had been still governed by kings of its own nation, who, as the bible establishes, depended continually on the caprice of priests, of prophets, or of the first comer, who by predictions, declamations, and wonders, could, at will, stir

up the Hebrew nation, and dispose of the crown: whereas in the time of Jesus, the Roman government had nothing to fear from the efforts of superstition.

CHAPTER THIRTEENTH.

JESUS REPASES INTO GALILEE ABOUT THE TIME OF THE
THIRD PASSOVER IN HIS MISSION.—WHAT HE DID
UNTIL THE TIME HE LEFT IT.

THE expression of St John, (chap. vi. 15.)^o who tells us, that *Jesus, knowing the guests he had entertained would come and take him by force on purpose to make him their king*, demonstrates that these guests had withdrawn at the end of the entertainment. This observation enables us to fix pretty correctly the route of Jesus, and affords us a reason for his conduct.

It was already late when the disciples said to their master, that it was time to send away the people. The preparations for the repast must have consumed time: the distribution of the victuals required also some hours; so that day light could not have been far off, when the meal was finished, and when Jesus dismissed his guests. It was, as appears, about the evening he learned the design they had of carrying him off to make him king; and it was not until after having received this intelligence, that he took the resolution of concealing himself in a mountain, after having dispatched his disciples to Capernaum. The latter to reach the place were obliged to make several tacks; when Jesus, observing this, changed perhaps his resolution,

and rejoined them and went to Gennefaret, on the north side of the lake. Seeing him arrive at the moment they thought him far off in the recesses of the mountain, his disciples were terrified; *they took him for a spirit*, for spirits were very common in Judea. They were confirmed in their opinion, when they perceived his shadow approach their vessel. Simon Peter observing him approach, did not doubt but he had seen him walking on the waters. Wanting to go and meet his master, he felt himself sinking; but Jesus took him by the hand, and saved him from the danger in which he believed himself to be; and after reprimanding him for his cowardice, went with him on board the ship. The apostles, who had not been much struck with the miracle of the five loaves, were very much astonished at this. They had been in great fear, and fear disposes to believe; in their distress they confessed unanimously, *that he was truly the Son of God.*

Jesus thereafter went to Gennefaret, where he arrived at noon. There several of his guests recognized him, and did not neglect to announce his arrival to others. They presented him the diseased, and he performed a great number of cures. We cannot too much admire the faith of the Galileans, who exposed at all seasons their sick in the streets, and the complaisance of Jesus, who indefatigably cured them!

The guests at the miraculous supper two days before, whom their affairs called home, returned to

their habitations: but the greatest number, that is, all the labouring people, having seen Jesus' ship take the direction of Capernaum, had set out by land for that city. Some vessels from Tiberias arrived there at the same time, but none carried Jesus, and nobody had seen him; for he had made his passage during night. The croud however tarried still in hopes of being again entertained *gratis*, when they learned at Capernaum, that our gentleman was on the opposite shore. Immediately all our idle folks set out on purpose to visit him, and they in fact did so, either by land or by water. (1)

But our parasites, instead of finding a repast served out on the grass, were entertained with a sermon. Jesus, who had not always wherewith to defray the expences of so numerous a court, held forth to them this language: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, ye seek me, not because you saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled.—" "Labour," added he, "for life everlasting——" Our folks, whose ideas extended not beyond the present life, did not comprehend what Jesus meant; they therefore asked him, what it was necessary they should do; on which he gave them to understand, that it was necessary they should become his disciples, as he was the Messiah. Here we are quite surprised to find them asking of Jesus, "What sign shewest thou then that we may believe? What extraordinary thing do you perform for that purpose?—You will

Q 3

(1) St John vi. 22,—31.

“ perhaps instance the supper you gave us, but did not
 “ *our fathers eat manna in the desert for forty years?*
 “ and after all, what is your supper in comparison with
 “ that wonder ?

From this we may perceive, that Jesus strove in vain to draw over these Galileans to his party. The continuation of the miraculous repast was alone capable of moving them. Jesus to no purpose maintained, that the bread, with which Moses had fed their fathers, was not the bread of heaven, which alone could properly nourish : *An empty belly has no ears* ; so they suffered him to preach on.—After he had spoke a great deal. “ Well,” said they in their turn, “ give us then
 “ this bread, which alone nourishes, for it signifies little
 “ tous what kind of bread we eat; but some we must have.
 “ Promise to furnish us with it at all times, and at this
 “ price we will be at your devotion.”

It appears, that if Jesus had possessed at this moment the same resources as formerly, he would have been able, at little expence, to form a small army, which the pleasure and assurance of having food without toil would have soon increased; but all failed. These folks offered themselves to him, providing that, on his part, he would always furnish them with bread. The proposition was urgent, and Jesus got off with so bad a grace, that his disciples themselves were shocked at it. He said to them, “ that he himself was bread, that his flesh
 “ was meat, and his blood wine ; and that to get to heaven, it was necessary to eat this bread and meat,
 “ and drink this wine sent down from heaven : that

"those only who eat it would he raise up, and conduct to everlasting banquets." Our dull folks comprehended none of this mysterious jargon, contrived on purpose to puzzle them. Perceiving, that they were not moved by it, he informed them, that in order to follow him, a particular *call* was necessary, and that as they were not disposed to do this, they were, therefore, not called. (2)

The recruits Jesus got on this occasion were but few in number. The Jews on the other hand were indignant, that he should pretend to have descended from heaven: *We know*, said they, *his father and mother*, and *we know where he was born*. All these rumours, spreading as far as Jerusalem, so irritated the priests, that they resolved on his death; (3) but the Son of God eluded their pursuits and designs by skillful marches and countermarches, which disconcerted their vigilance. It was especially in the capital that they wished to ensnare him; but Jesus had not been there the last passover. His distance from the metropolis did not prevent them from knowing his most secret proceedings; and from this he concluded there were some false brethren in the number of his disciples. He was not deceived: but the fear of being betrayed in a country, where his resources began to fail thro' his refusal to give the people to eat, induced him to dissemble till he should arrive in a place of safety. He set out therefore on a journey homeward to Capernaum.

(2) St John v. 16.

(3) St John vii. 1.

At this place he recited nearly the same sermon he had in vain preached to the Galileans. No one, however, would consent to receive for food his flesh and blood only. Those who enjoyed his confidence knew very well that he gave better cheer, but his other disciples asserted, that they could not subsist on this mysterious mess, and took their leave of him. (4) Unable to do better, Christ was obliged to suffer them to depart.

Jesus, observing the defection of a part of his troop, was vexed at it; and in sorrow for the harm it would occasion, asked the twelve, "And will you also leave me." Then Simon Peter answers him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe, and sure, that thou art the Christ, the son of the living God." Thus Jesus was assured, in the best way he could, of the fidelity of his apostles;—yet we see, that in spite of his infinite knowledge he kept always the traitor Judas in his company, altho' he must have foreseen, that he would deliver him up to his enemies.

Meanwhile he departed, on purpose to return into Galilee, whether his apostles followed him, altho' his last preaching, and particularly the refusal of viands, had dissatisfied the Galileans.—They did not indeed give him a very welcome reception. The arrival of some Pharisees and doctors from Jerusalem completely marred every thing. They were deputed by the chiefs in the capital to watch the conduct of our

(4) St John vi. 66, &c.

gentleman, and to put the people on their guard against him. Every one knows, how strictly the Jews adhere to the ceremonies of their law; and in spite of his protestations of attachment to the law, Jesus, like his trusty friends, observed none of its ordinances. It was particularly taken much amiss, that they ate without washing their hands; but he defended himself with saying, that it was better to violate traditions and neglect ceremonies, than to infringe the commandments of God, as the doctors did. He advanced, contrary to express law, *that nothing which enters the body defiles it, and that it is what comes out of it that renders it impure.* This seems to establish, that Christ and his troop were not scrupulous as to their aliments. Thereafter he launched out in invectives against the doctors, whom he called hypocrites ignorant and blind, who conducted others that were blind. In his anger he did not perceive that the compliment was not less offensive to the people than to their guides. On this account the latter preserved a deep resentment, but the populace did not regard it; besides Jesus did not allow them time for reflection; he made them a fine discourse to prove, that the lawyers and priests were the worst of men and the least charitable, and that one could not be happy, either in this world or in the other, without becoming his disciple.

In the mean time, his people came to advertise him, that there was no safety for him in this place. He left it therefore in great haste, with an intent to go towards the frontiers of Tyre and Sidon. His design.

was to live concealed in a house of the country, whither he had withdrawn; but with such great renown as that of our hero, it was difficult to continue long unknown: The secret of his retreat was divulged; and, as misfortune sometimes turns to good, this trifling duplicity procured him the advantage of performing a miracle among the Gentiles. A woman of Canaan came, and besought him to deliver her daughter from a devil that tormented her. Jesus at first made her no answer. She insisted—the apostles interceded for her, and pressed their master to grant her request, merely on purpose to silence her; for she spoke clamorously, and might have disclosed that he was the Messiah. He defended himself on the plea of his being sent to the Jews only, and not to the Heathens—They again besought him, and answered his comparison by another—He at length yielded; and the girl was delivered from her devil, or her vapours. (5)

The success of Jesus in this country terminated with this miracle. He passed from thence into Decapolis; and there acquired some consequence from the cure of a dumb and deaf man, on pronouncing the word *Epheta*, and then putting his finger into his ears and spittle on his tongue. It would therefore appear, that our missionary made a sufficiently abundant harvest of alms. He moreover wrought a great number of miracles on the sick, the cripple, and the maimed. But it was his custom to steal away when his miraculous power began to make a noise; he ac-

(5) St Matth xv. St Luke vii. St John vii.

cordingly withdrew to a mountain at the distance of three days journey from the place where he had performed so many miracles. (6) The people in a croud followed him in his retreat, and it appears that they did so without eating. But at this time, Christ, loaded with provisions or money his miracles had procured him, again saw himself in a situation to lay the table-cloth. As if he knew nothing of this, he asked one of his apostles how many loaves they had: Seven, answered they. He then ordered the multitude to sit down on the ground; and, taking the loaves, blessed them, together with some small fishes—These were distributed to four thousand men, besides women and children, who were all satisfied; and with the remains of the repast, they afterwards filled seven baskets.—This prodigy appears to be a mere repetition of what we have related before; yet St Chrysostom maintains, that the difference of the number of baskets proves irrefragably they must not be confounded.

Admitting this, it would appear, that Jesus, having no longer any safe retreat in his own country, sacrificed once more the money and provisions his prodigies had enabled him to amass. It was necessary to gain the people, and he at that time felt he had very great need of them; he was generous, when he had the means to be so, and he had not forgot that they had promised to follow him, providing he would give them to eat.

(6) St Mark xv. St Mark vii.

The evangelists, however, overheated with the idea of this miracle, forgot another, that did not merit less to be remarked. Indeed, what a prodigy to see four thousand men, without reckoning women and little children, following Jesus during three days without drinking or eating? or else we must believe, that, prepared to travel, these people had provided themselves with provisions, which suddenly failed. Finally, in a desert, whence came the baskets they made use of in gathering up the remains of the entertainment? It is to be presumed, that they dropt down from heaven. But on the other hand, why not make loaves and fishes drop down also? By a new miracle, it was undoubtedly still requisite to feed this multitude during the three days march necessary for their return. Yet, throughout the whole business, it would have been a shorter way to make the people feel neither hunger nor wants. It would have been a shorter way still, to convert at once, by an effort of effectual mercy, all the inhabitants of Judea, and spare themselves the trouble of so many entertainments, flights, marches and countermarches, which at last terminated in a manner so tragical to the hero of the romance.

The Pharisees and Sadducees did not overlook Jesus; and on learning, that he had returned to the interior of the kingdom, they went in search of him. One would suspect, that the evangelists make them much worse than they were in reality, by representing them as eager to ruin them. Was it then so difficult to arrest thirteen men? Be that as it may, these

Pharisees at this time accosted Jesus very politely, and demanded of him a miracle. "You perform them," said they, "it seems, by dozens in presence of a thousand people, who, by your own confession, do not believe in you; give us then a specimen of your skill, and we will be less opiniative than the people, of whom you complain. Do then shew this condescension to us." Jesus was inexorable, and perpetually referred them to Jonas. This refusal offended them: the Man-God inveighed against them, and as the presence of these inconvenient spectators rendered his power useless, he quitted them in order to go to Bethsaida.

On the road his apostles asked him the reason of his refusal to work a miracle in presence of persons who besought him in so handsome a manner; upon which Jesus, by a figure, gave them to understand, that he could not operate before people so clear-sighted; *Beware*, said he to them, *of the leaven of the Pharisees, and of the leaven of Herod*. Our silly folks, who had not time to provide bread, thought their master meant to reprove them for their negligence. Any other but Jesus would have laughed at the mistake, but the state of his affairs chagrined him, and he treated them very harshly. (7)

On his entering Bethsaida they brought him a blind man, whom he cured by applying spittle to his eyes. But this remedy produced a pleasant effect: the man

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(7) *St Matt. xvi. St Mark, viii. St Luke xii.*

saw men walking like trees; Jesus then laid his hands on him, and immediately he saw quite otherwise. (8)

This miracle gained no conquest to the Messiah. He went, therefore, to try his fortune in the villages, in the environs of Cæsarea-Philippi. It is in this journey, that asking his apostles, what they thought of him, some said, that he passed for Elias, others for Jeremiah, &c.; but Peter openly confessed, that, as for himself, he acknowledged him for the Christ: (9) a confession which, they say, has since gained him the honour of being placed at the head of the sacred college, and of being declared the head of the church.

Christ, although sovereign in heaven, possessed nothing on earth, and of consequence could make no temporal gifts. He therefore made his apostles a recompence, by promising them the spiritual privilege of damning and saving the rest of mankind at their pleasure.—He promised to Peter the place of *door-keeper of Paradise*, since become so lucrative an office to his successors and assigns. Meanwhile Jesus recommended silence to the troop on the promotion which he was to make: but perhaps the traitor Judas, not satisfied with the office of treasurer, did not preserve the secret.

Notwithstanding the suffrage of Peter, the consequences, which might result from the choler of the

(8) St Mark viii. 22—26.

(9) St Matt. xvii. St Mark, vii. St Luke, ix.

priests, were always present to the mind of Jesus. He saw himself cried down, and rejected on all sides, and presumed with enough good sense, that being once excluded from all the provinces, and the Gentiles not much inclined to receive for legislator a Jew expelled his own country, he would be constrained, sooner or later, to return to Jerusalem, where he must expect to meet with perilous adventures. On the other hand, the Romans, masters of the forces,* over whom the Jews could arrogate no authority, would very quickly have put an end to the mission of a man whom they must have regarded either as a fool or as a disturber of the public peace, if he should have dared to turn his batteries against them. Indeed there is reason to believe, that the mission of Jesus lasted so long in Judea, merely because the Romans were not much displeased, that a restless and turbulent people should amuse themselves with following a man of the rank of Jesus, or a pretended Messiah, to whose appearance the prepossessions of the nation gave rise. Always certain of being able to crush those who dared to undertake the boldest enterprises, they cared but little about what might be done in the country by vagabonds, so little formidable to an authority seconded by disciplined legions.

The situation of the Son of God must have alarmed the companions of his fortune, however dull we may suppose them to have been; it was therefore necessary to contrive means to encourage those at least who were the honest dupes of his vain promises. He did not dissemble the bad state of his affairs, the fate

he had to dread, and the death with which he was menaced. He anticipated them on this subject, and declared that even if he should suffer death, they must not be discouraged, for at the end of three days he would rise triumphant from the tomb.—We will afterwards see the use the apostles made of this prediction of their master, which must doubtless at the time have appeared to them as foolish as incredible.

To retain them in his party, and revive their zeal, he entertained them incessantly with the beauty of his Father's kingdom; but he forewarned them, that to arrive there, they must have courage, love him sincerely, and agree to suffer with him. These melancholy sermons shewed the situation of the orator, and tended rather to depress than incite the courage of his auditory. Jesus, therefore, thought it seasonable to present to his disciples a specimen of the glory of which he had so often vaunted. For this purpose he exhibited the brilliant spectacle of the *transfiguration*. All the apostles were not witnesses of it; he granted this favour to three only, Peter, James, and John, his most intimate confidants, to whom he recommended silence. This scene took place, it is said, on mount Thabor. There Jesus appeared irradiated with glory, accompanied with two other comrades, whom the apostles took for Moses and Elias, and whom, as far as we can discover, they had never seen before. (10) A cloud comes unexpectedly; envelopes the three luminous bodies; and when they no longer beheld any person, a voice was heard pronouncing these words, *This is my beloved Son*. The disciples were asleep

while this spectacle was displayed—a circumstance which has occasioned a suspicion, that the whole was only a dream.

Meanwhile the apostles who had been deprived of this spectacle, and remained at the foot of the mountain, wanted to make the trial of their spiritual powers on a lunatic, or person possessed ;—but the devil made no account of their exorcisms. The father of the disordered person, perceiving their master descending from the mountain, presented to him his son, whom he cured immediately. Thereafter, he gave a strong reprimand to those *fumblers*: he maintained, that their want of success, was owing to want of faith, a grain of which, according to him, was sufficient to displace mountains: he therefore recommended to them fasting and prayer, as the surest receipt for expelling certain demons, more rebellious than others. (11)

The people, however, withstood all these wonders: the devils, with whom they were possessed, could not be expelled by any means which Christ had yet contrived. Thinking, therefore, to draw over some of the strangers, whom the solemnities brought always in great numbers to the capital, he resolved, on account of the feast of Tabernacles, secretly to repair thither. Agitated, however, by the most troublesome misgivings, he traversed Galilee; he explained himself on his fears in an enigmatical and concealed manner to his apostles, who apprehended none of it; but who, on

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(11) St Matt. xvi. St Mark ix. St Luke ix. 17.

observing their master grieved, conformed themselves to his humour.

On arriving at Capernaum the place of his usual residence, the officers charged with collecting the customs, took him for a stranger, and did not even recognise Matthew their old companion; they accordingly exacted the custom or tribute. Jesus being a Jew was offended at their demand; but whether they did not hearken to his reasons, or that he did not wish to be known, he dispatched Peter in search of a piece of thirty-pence in the mouth of a fish, or if they will, bade him go and catch with a line a fish, which, being sold for that sum, served to pay the custom.

The apostles, having understood from the Saviour's discourses, that his kingdom was still very distant, amused themselves with disputing on the pre-eminence and ranks they should enjoy in their future empire, which had been obscurely announced to them: in this they have been since faithfully imitated by their successors. In the mean time Jesus took occasion from this dispute to make them a fine sermon on humility. He calls for a child, places it in the midst of them, and declares, that this child is the greatest among them. This sermon by which our clergy have profited so well, contains fine parables, and points out excellent means, whereby to attain heaven, but not to thrive on earth. As all these, however, are only repetitions of what is taught in the sermon on the mount, we refer the reader to it. (13)

Jesus wrought no miracles during his abode at Capernaum, where he had an interest not to be too much spoken of. His brethren or his parents, who it seems were of the same mind as the priests, repaired to that place on purpose to persuade him to leave his asylum, and go into Judea, where he might exhibit his skill. They reminded him, that the feast should draw him to Jerusalem, where he could not fail to find an opportunity for signalising himself. (13)

This ironical tone enabled Jesus to foresee, that they were plotting against him. Here eternal truth extricates itself from these importunities by means of falsehood. The Son of God tells his brethren to go to the feast, but assures them, that for himself he would not go. (14) This however did not hinder him from taking the road to Jerusalem, but with the greatest secrecy. In his way he cured ten lepers, among whom one only, who was a Samaritan, shewed any gratitude to his physician; and from courtesy to his faith his sins were remitted him. (15) Notwithstanding this fine miracle and absolution, the incredulous do not find, that Christ can be acquitted of having uttered a lie. It seems to them very strange, that the Son of God, to whom his omnipotence furnishes so many honourable means of acting openly, has recourse to subtilty and deception in order to elude the snares of his enemies. The conduct of Jesus on this occasion can be explained only by saying, that what seems falsehood to carnal eyes is truth in the gospel.

(13) St John vii.

(14) Ibid. 8

(15) St Luke xvii. 11, &c.

CHAPTER FOURTEENTH.

JESUS SHEWS HIMSELF AT JERUSALEM---HE IS FORCED TO
LEAVE IT---RESURRECTION OF LAZARUS---TRIUM-
PHANT ENTRY OF CHRIST---HIS RETREAT
TO THE GARDEN OF OLIVES---THE
LORD'S SUPPER---HE IS AR-
RESTED.

Our hero, who had resolved not to shew himself publicly at Jerusalem, soon after changed his intention on learning the diversity of opinions which divided the capital on his account. (1) He imagined, that his presence and discourses would remedy the inconstancy of the people, and remove the perplexity of disputants; but he deceived himself. He who so often recommended the *cunning of serpents* failed on this occasion. But how revoke an immutable decree? The world had been created solely on purpose that man might sin, and man had sinned, in order that Christ by his death might have the glory of making atonement for the sinner.

(1) St John, vii. 11, &c.

If they spoke much evil of Jesus in Jerusalem, they spoke also much good. Praise is a snare, wherein the Son of God himself was caught. Flattering himself with being able to reconcile the suffrages, he goes to the temple, and preaches. But what must have been his surprise, when on beginning to speak he heard the cries of rage, and the multitude accusing him of being possessed with a devil. In spite of the confused noise that reigned among the audience, Jesus continued to harrangue; perhaps indeed he might have succeeded in conquering the bad disposition of the assembly, if a company of archers had not come, and interrupted him, precisely in the warmest part of his sermon. He was speaking of his heavenly Father, and this occurrence has undoubtedly made us lose a sublime treatise on the Divinity. These archers, however, had no design to seize him; they wanted only to impose silence on him; it was therefore easy for him to steal away.

Jesus, whose temper appears to have been vindictive and restless, was piqued at the insult, and continued his invectives against the priests, doctors, and principal men among the Jews. They took counsel on the subject; and agreed to fulminate a decree against him, and try him for contumacy; but Nicodemus, whom we mentioned before, undertook his defence, and proposed to his brethren to go and hear him before condemning him. They however insisted, that *no good ever came out of Nazareth*, that is, that his protegee could be only a vagabond.

Jesus learned in his retreat in the mount of Olives, that they had delayed his trial. He accordingly appeared next day in the temple by day break. The doctors and senators came a little later, and brought him a female accused of adultery—a crime for which, according to the law, she ought to suffer death. The doctors perhaps acquainted with her conduct, and informed of his drawing after him women of wicked lives, wanted to ensnare him. Our gentleman might have got off by merely saying, that it was not for him to judge; but he wished to argue. He wrote on the ground; and concluded very prudently, that for one to judge it is necessary to be himself exempted from all sin. Then addressing himself to the doctors, “let him among you,” says he, “who is without sin, cast the first stone at her.” At these words our doctors went away shrugging their shoulders. Jesus remained alone with the adulterers, whom the Jews would not have treated so tenderly if she had been really culpable; upon this he said to her, “Since no man hath accused thee, neither will I condemn thee:—Go then, and sin no more.”

Having happily escaped from this trial, Jesus thought himself in safety; but, induced by his natural petulance, he again hazarded a sermon in the temple: he spoke only of himself; what follows is nearly his strongest argument. “You ask,” says he, “a full proof by two witnesses. Now I bear witness of my Father, and my Father bears witness of me; you therefore ought to believe in me;” which amounts to this; *my Father proves me, and I prove my*

Father. The doctors were but little surprised with this circuitous and erroneous reasoning, and with a view to come directly to the point, Who art thou? demanded they. "I am," replied Jesus, "from the beginning, and I have many things to say to you; but I speak to the world those things only which I have heard of my Father." The audience were no doubt impatient at these ambiguous answers: Jesus, who wanted to augment their embarrassment, then added, that they would know him much better, after they had hanged him.

Our hero did not omit to display great views in this conference; he informed them in dark language, that it would not perhaps be impossible to shake off the Roman yoke. But either thro' fear of chastisement, or that they did not believe such a man in a condition to effect so great a revolution, they affected not to comprehend him. Piqued at finding the doctors and Pharisees so dull and opiniative he called them *children of the devil*, he affirmed that he was *older than Abraham*; in short, he broke out in a manner so unreasonable, that the people, declaring against him, wanted to stone him. Jesus, perceiving his folly when too late, concealed himself at first, and thereafter seized the opportunity to run away.

From this time his miracles became more rare, and the zeal of the people subsided. It was therefore necessary to rekindle it: Jesus accordingly performed a miracle by curing a man born blind, with a little earth moisten-

ed with spittle. This man was, it would seem, a well known mendicant, whom they could not suspect of any artifice. Yet they would no longer tolerate him, after he had received his sight; an incident which no doubt diminished the alms he was in use to receive; but perhaps he was made a disciple; and indeed some legends assert, that after the death of Jesus he came into Gaul, where he became bishop, that is, inspector, —which presupposes good organs of vision.

Be that as it may, the prodigy made a noise, and came to the knowledge of the Pharisees. The beggar underwent an examination; he openly confessed, that one called Jesus had cured him with a clay of his composition and some bathings in Siloam. It must however be acknowledged, that the bad humour of the Pharisees went a little too far on this occasion. They made it a crime for the physician to have composed his ointment on the Sabbath, and formed the project of excommunicating whoever should countenance our performer of cures.

This resolution made Jesus tremble. He knew the power of excommunication among the Jews; he saw himself crossed in all his designs; and dared not venture to preach in Jerusalem, nor shew himself in any other place; every thing, even his miracles turned against him. It was not without some difficulty, that he had escaped from the capital. Meanwhile at a little distance he found an asylum, and indeed society in Bethany, where his friend Lazarus possessed a house. He accordingly took the resolution of retir-

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ing thither; but although it was a chateau, the gang that accompanied him might have incommoded their host. This determined him to send seventy of his disciples on a mission to Judea; and he now gave them very ample powers, for on their return we find them applauding themselves, and overjoyed at the facility with which they expelled the devils.

Scarcely had Christ arrived at Bethany, when, in order to receive him in a becoming manner, they prepared a banquet. But the voluptuous Magdalene, content to devour with her eyes her dear Saviour, left Martha her sister to superintend the arrangements in the kitchen, while she herself continued at his feet. (2) Peevishness, and perhaps jealousy, got the better of Martha; she came and scolded Magdalene, but the tender Messiah undertook the defence of his penitent, and asserted that she had chosen the better part; brother Lazarus, who came in unexpectedly, terminated the squabble by ordering them to their work. (3)

This little altercation was however the cause, why Jesus did not tarry long at Bethany.—He was leaving it, when a Pharisee, thro' pure curiosity, invited him to dinner. The Messiah accepted his invitation: but our unpolished Pharisee had not the civility to give his guest water to wash with. This occasioned him a fine sermon on charity, filled with marvellous comparisons, which however we will pass over in silence, as our orator so-frequently conned over the same lesson, and as this dinner appears to be a repetition of that we have mentioned before.

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(3) St Luke, x. and xi.

From this period till the feast of the dedication of the temple, our hero wandered in the environs of Jerusalem along with his disciples, whom he incessantly entertained with the grandeur of his aerial kingdom, and what it was necessary to do in order to enter it. It was, according to St Luke, on this occasion, and according to St Matthew, in the sermon on the mount, that he taught the apostles, who could not read, a short prayer, called since that time the Lord's prayer, which Christians continue devoutly to repeat, injurious as it is to the divinity, whom it seems to accuse *of leading us into temptation*.

Meanwhile, time run on without any advantage. The cessation of prodigies and preaching occasioned that of alms. — Jesus again hazarded a sermon in a village: but although it attracted the admiration of the people, who asked nothing better than to admire, it produced no effect. Towards the end of Christ's mission we no longer see the croud running after him.—If he wished to perform a miracle, he was under the necessity of calling to him those he wished to cure. For eighteen years an old woman of this village had been quite bent; it was according to the language of the country, the devil, who had kept her in this inconvenient posture. Jesus calls her, and exclaims: "Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity." (4) The old woman made efforts to become straight; she approaches with the pace of a tortoise the feet of the Messiah; he lays his hands on

(4) St Luke, xiii. 11.

her, and immediately she walks upright like a wench of fifteen. At this time the devil spoke not a word on his departure; on which it has been remarked, that Satan followed always the opinion of the spectators of the Saviour's miracles, and marvellously coincided with them in acknowledging or rejecting the Messiah. This analogous conduct of the spectators and Satan was perhaps the result of the excommunication fulminated against all who regarded Jesus as the Messiah.

The reputation of John-Baptist subsisted still on the banks of the Jordan. To excite the primitive zeal, or perhaps with an intent to induce the disciples of John his forerunner, who had borne him such flattering testimony, to follow him, Jesus turned towards that quarter; but the attempt was fruitless. He succeeded no better in curing a dropical person, that chanced to be in the house of a Pharisee, who gave the Saviour a dinner.—His cures were admired, but he spoiled all by his extravagant arguments, so very offensive to the greatest part of his hearers. As the last recourse he essayed to attach to himself publicans, officers, and such like disreputable persons; but these were only feeble props, and their familiarity made him lose the little esteem which others still entertained for him. (5)

The sight of punishment has often occasioned the loss of courage even to the most determined hero.

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(5) St Mark, x. St Luke, xiii---17.

Ours, agitated by a croud of untoward events, imagined, that nothing being dearer to men than life, and nothing more difficult than to come back after leaving it, the people of Jerusalem, notwithstanding the clamours of the priests, would not fail to declare in his favour, if he could succeed in making them believe, that he had the power of raising the dead. Lazarus, the intimate friend of Jesus, appeared to him the fittest person in the world, for presenting to the public the spectacle of a dead man brought again to life. When every thing was properly concerted and disposed, Christ set out for Bethany. Hereupon Martha and Magdalene sent to meet him, and publicly inform him, that their brother was very sick. Jesus made them no answer, but speaking aloud, and so as to be heard, "This sickness," said he, "is not unto death, but for the glory of God."—This was already telling too much.

Instead of going to Bethany or any where else, Christ stays two days in a village without doing any thing: thereafter he tells his apostles, that it was necessary to return into Judea. He was already there at the very time he spoke, but he meant no doubt to speak of the capital. They represented that it would be a very imprudent journey, as a short time before the populace wanted to stone him. We see, that Jesus said this on purpose to give room to his friends to invite him not to neglect friend Lazarus in his sickness. Besides the following words evince, that he had no intention of going to Jerusalem. Our friend *Lazarus sleepeth*; but *I go that I may awake him out of sleep.*

—On hearing this the apostles thought he had recovered. Jesus declares to them, that *he is dead*, but that he is highly pleased with his not having being present at Lazarus's decease, as it would afford means to confirm them in the faith.

The two days, which Jesus passed in the village, joined to the long space of time, he took in going about half a league, were immediately converted into *four days* from the time Jesus pretended Lazarus was dead. At last he arrives at the abode of the defunct, whom they had deposited in a vault adjoining to his house, and not in a sepulchre out of the city, according to the custom of those days. After some questions put to Martha on her belief, he assures her, that her brother shall arise again. *Yes*, says she, *but it will be at the last day*. Here our Thaumaturge affects to be very sensibly touched ; he trembles, he weeps, invokes the aid of heaven, causes himself to be brought to the vault, makes it be opened, calls on Lazarus with a loud voice, and commands him to come out. The dead man, altho' tied and wrapped up in his grave clothes, arises, and is unloosed before witnesses at the entrance of the vault. (6)

It must be acknowledged, that this prodigy was conducted with very little dexterity. St John, (the only Evangelist who relates a miracle so striking,) in vain props his relation with the presence of the Jews : he destroys his own work by not making them come till after the death of Lazarus to console his sisters. It was necessary, that the Jews should have seen him

die, dead, and embalmed, and that they should themselves feel the smell of his corruption; in fine that they should converse with him after his coming out of the tomb. (7) Unbelievers, who have treated on miracles, have exhausted all the darts of criticism on this one. To investigate it would be only repeating what they have said. The Jews found there such strong marks of knavery, that far from being converted they took more serious measures against Jesus, who having intimation thereof withdrew towards the desert, to a city called *Epbrem*, where he abode with his disciples. In the mean time the cities and villages were enjoined to refuse him an asylum, and the inhabitants to deliver him up to the magistrates. In a word his miracle occasioned a general proscription of him. On presenting himself at the gates of a town in Samaria, they at first refused to let him pass; he was not permitted to stop at Jericho, altho' he there gave sight to a blind man. (8) He therefore returned to Bethany, where he was received not by Lazarus, who had perhaps been obliged to save himself on account of his being concerned in such an imposture, but as St Matthew affirms, by Simon the leper. Lazarus after his resurrection appears no longer on the stage. (9)

This rejection and desertion of Christ threw the apostles into consternation. To reanimate their confidence, Jesus caused a fig-tree die in twenty-four hours to punish it for not producing figs at a season when it

(7) St John, xi.

(8) St Matthew says, (xx. 29, &c.) that Jesus gave sight to two blind men.

was physically impossible for it to carry about the month of March. (10)—As ^{in case they} ~~th~~ of the Messiah, even when they appear foolish in the eyes of ordinary men, have an important signification in the eyes of devotees illuminated by faith, we ought to perceive in the miracle of this fig-tree one of the fundamental dogmas of the Christian religion symbolically represented. In this point of view the fig-tree cursed is the mass of mankind, whom, according to our theologians, the God of mercy curses, and condemns to eternal flames, for having had neither faith nor grace, which they could not possibly acquire of themselves, and which God does not seem to have been willing to give them. Thus we will find, that the ridiculous passage of the fig-tree in the gospel is intended to typify one of the most profound dogmas of the Christian religion.

Whilst Jesus in this manner instructed his apostles by figures and ingenious parables, they were labouring hard against him at Jerusalem. It appears from the gospel, that the Sanhedrim was divided on his account. They perhaps wished much to punish him, but not to put him to death. All were of opinion, that he should be arrested without noise, and that they should consider afterwards on the punishment to be inflicted on him. The most fiery of the priests wished, that he should be arrested in the capital, and assassinated during the hurry of the festival. All this establishes, that they did not consider themselves certain the people

(10) St Mark, xi. 20.

rest themselves in his behalf. Perhaps
 ... great reason: What a part of that
 people did in his favour, when he approached Jerusa-
 lem, evinces, that it would have been very dangerous
 to act openly. In pursuance of this plan, they secretly
 promised a reward to whoever should deliver up Jesus,
 and we will soon find one of his apostles betray his
 master for a trifling sum.

There is ample reason to believe, that before en-
 tering Jerusalem, Jesus caused himself to be announ-
 ced by his friends in that city. His adherents la-
 boured to render his entry into the capital somewhat
 brilliant. As for himself, wishing, perhaps, to dis-
 play modesty in the midst of his triumph, or unable
 to do better, he chose for his steed a young ass that
 had never been rode on. They seized by his order a
 she-ass and her colt. In place of a saddle, some of
 the disciples laid their clothes on the back of the ass.†
 The company advanced in good order—The people,
 ever fond of a spectacle, ran to see this; and we may
 believe, that if some at this time paid sincere homage
 to the triumpher, the greatest number laughed at him,
 and shouted at the ridiculous farce. (11)

The chief magistrate, fearing an uproar, endea-
 voured to quiet the populace, to whom the disciples
 had set the example. He accordingly addressed Je-
 sus himself, who answered, that "the stones would
 speak, rather than his friends should be silent."—

(11) St Matt. xxi. St Mark, xi. St Luke, xix. and St
 John, xii.

This seems to insinuate an insurrection, in case they should attempt to employ authority; and the magistrate understood very well, that this was not the moment to provoke Jesus.

As soon as Christ had entered Jerusalem, he betook himself to weeping, and predicting its ruin. The announcing of calamities was, and will ever be, a sure method to excite the attention of the vulgar. Some persons of consequence, who knew not the cause of the riotous assemblies of the people around Jesus, on enquiry were answered, It is Jesus of Nazareth—it is a prophet of Galilee. St Mark assures us, that in this transaction, decisive in behalf of the Son of God, Jesus gave once more to the people the pillage of the merchandize exposed to sale in the court before the porch of the temple. (12) The thing is very credible; it was indeed wiser and more necessary at present than at the former period.

Profiting by the tumult, Jesus cures a great many blind and lame people. Whilst these wonders were performing on one side, they exclaimed Hosannah on the other. (13) Some besought the author of these exclamations and this tumult to stop them; but our gentleman had no longer measures to observe—He perceived it was necessary to gain over the popular enthusiasm, and that it would be silly to appease it. Besides, the uncertainty of success had thrown him into distress, which hindered him from seeing or under-

(12) St Mark, xi. 15.

(13) St Matt. xxi. 14: St John, xii.

standing any thing. A child, frightened or too much pressed in the croud, began to cry, while Jesus was speaking, "Father, save me from this hour." They took the child's voice for a voice from heaven. St John, moreover, informs us, that the disciples had passed upon the people the famous miracle of Lazarus's resurrection, which, attested by eye-witnesses, must have made a great impression on the astonished vulgar. They did not entertain a doubt but that the voice from heaven which they had heard was that of an angel, who bore testimony to Jesus; and the latter, profiting dexterously of the occasion, said to them, "This voice came not because of me, but for your sakes." He afterwards took occasion from thence to harrangue the people, and announce himself for the Christ; but he spoiled his sermon, by expressions which shewed the trouble into which his apprehensions had thrown him. In a word, it would appear, that our man knew not how to draw from the circumstance all the advantage it seemed to promise him.—He left the city, and retired to Bethany, where he passed the night with his disciples.

In general our hero was subject to low spirits;—we constantly find in him a mixture of audacity and pusillanimity. Accustomed to strike his blows in the country, and among rude and ignorant people, he did not know how to conduct himself in a city, or to succeed against vigilant and intelligent enemies.

Thus he lost the fruit of his memorable journey, which had been long before projected. We do not indeed find that after this he returned to Jerusalem, except to undergo his trial. Melancholy and fear had deprived him of all presence of mind, and his disciples were under the necessity of reminding him that it was time to celebrate the Passover. They asked him, where he wished them to go and prepare the entertainment : He bade them go to the house of the first comer, which they did. A chamber was provided for them, where they assembled with their master, who, ever occupied with his sorrowful thoughts, gave them to understand, that this Passover would likely be the last, which he should celebrate with them.

—His language was mournful ; he wanted to bathe their feet * in order to teach them, that humility was essentially necessary, when one was the weakest. Having afterwards sat down to table †, he made them understand in language sufficiently explicit, that he was afraid of being betrayed by one of them. There is every reason to believe, that his suspicions fell principally upon Judas, whose frequent going to and coming from the houses of the priests might be known to his master. As Judas was treasurer to the troop, and consequently charged with paying the expences of the entertainment, Jesus, it appears, wished it to be understood at the time, that they were regaled at the expence of his life and his blood. “Take,” said he to them in a figurative stile, “for this is my body.—He thereafter gave them the cup, saying, that it was “his blood which was to be shed for them.” Judas very readily comprehended the meaning of this enig-

ma; he arose from table, and immediately withdrew: but the other apostles comprehended none of it. It is however on this emblem, that some doctors have since built the famous dogma of *transubstantiation*; they enjoin rational beings to believe, that at the word of a priest bread is changed into the real body, and wine into the real blood of Christ. They have taken literally the figurative words of our missionary, and have employed them in forming a *mystery* or rather the most curious juggle that priests have ever devised on purpose to deceive mankind. (14)

After supper our guests retired with their master to the mount of Olives, where they thought themselves in safety; but our hero did not entertain the same opinion. Scarcely had the Man-God entered the garden of Olives when a mortal terror seizes him; he weeps like a child, and anticipates the pangs of death. His apostles, more tranquil, yield to sleep, and Jesus, who was afraid of being surprised, mildly reproaches them—"Could you not," says he, "watch with me one hour?" Judas, whom we have seen depart very suddenly, and who had not rejoined the troop, gave extreme uneasiness to Christ, and every moment redoubled his terror. It is affirmed, that an angel came to strengthen him in this situation: Yet they inform us that he was afterwards seized with a bloody sweat, which can only denote a very great weakness.

The agitated condition of the Saviour appears very surprising to persons, in whose minds faith has not removed every difficulty the gospel presents. They are

much astonished to find such weakness in a God, who knew, from all eternity, that he was destined to die for the redemption of the human race. They aver, that God his father, without exposing his dear innocent son to such cruel torments, might by one word have pardoned guilty men, conformed them to his views, and remitted their iniquities : they think, that the conduct of God would have been more simple and generous in appeasing his wrath at less expence, on account of an apple eat four thousand years ago. But the ways of God are not those of men : The Deity ought never to act in a natural way and easily understood. It is the essence of religion, that men should never comprehend any part of divine conduct ; this furnishes to their spiritual guides the pleasure of explaining it to them for their money.

Whatever sentiments we may entertain on this matter, it is certain, that the Man-God on the approach of his death shewed a weakness, which many ordinary men would blush to display in a similar situation. Meanwhile the traitor Judas, at the head of a company of archers or soldiers, proceeded towards Jesus, whose retreats he knew. A kiss was the signal, by which the guards were to recognise the person whom they had orders to seize. Already Christ beheld the lanthorns † advancing, which lighted the march of these Sbirri ; and perceiving the impossibility of escaping, he makes a virtue of necessity. Like a coward become desperate, he resolutely presents himself to the gang ; *Whom seek ye ?* said he, with a firm tone :—*Jesus*, answered they. *I am he*. Here

Judas confirms with a kiss this heroical confession. The apostles, awakened by the noise, come to the succour of their master; Peter, the most zealous among them, cuts off with a stroke of his sabre the ear of Malchus, servant of the High Priest. Jesus, observing the inutility of resistance, commands him to put up his sword into its scabbard, sets in order again the ear of Malchus, (who escaped at the expence of being frightened), and afterwards surrendered himself up to and accompanies those, who had come to seize him.

It is related that at first the party, who came on purpose to seize Jesus, were forced to give ground.—The fact is very possible: it was dark, and the archers, perceiving the apostles but very indistinctly, might believe, that their enemies were more numerous than in reality, and therefore be afraid of being surrounded: but plucking up courage, they fulfilled their commission.

Whilst they bound the Son of God with cords, he besought the chief of the detachment not to molest his apostles, and as they wanted himself only, he easily obtained his request. St John believes, that Jesus made this entreaty in order to fulfil a prophecy; but it appears, our hero thought it was neither useful nor just to involve in his ruin men, whose succours might still be necessary to him, or who, being at large, would have better opportunity to act in his favour.

 CHAPTER FIFTEENTH.

 TRIAL AND CONDEMNATION OF JESUS.—HIS PUNISHMENT
AND DEATH.

WHEN the enemies of Jesus saw him in their hands, they were not less embarrassed than before that event. The Jewish nation, from the time the Romans had subdued them, had no longer the right of the sword. To inflict torture on every man who had sinned against religion, it was sufficient at any former period, that the high priest pronounced sentence on the culprit. The Romans, more tolerant in this point, rarely punished with death; and besides to take away life they required decisive proofs against the accused.

Annianus, father-in-law of the high priest Caiaphas, was known among the Jews for a very subtle man. It was to Annianus' house, therefore, that they first conducted Jesus. We are ignorant of what passed in this first scene of the bloody tragedy of Christ; it is only to be presumed, that he underwent there an examination, in which we know not how he came off.

From the house of Annianus they transferred Jesus to that of Caiaphas. He was the man most interested by his office in the ruin of every innovator in matters of religion, yet we do not find that pontiff speaking

with anger; he conducts himself according to law, and as a man who understands his profession.—“Who,” says he to Jesus, “are your disciples, their number and names?” Jesus makes no answer.—“But at least explain to me your doctrine. What end does it propose? you must have a system. Tell us then what it is.”—“I spoke openly to the world; it is not I, but those who have heard me, that ought to be interrogated.”

Here one of the officers of the high priest gives Jesus a blow on the ear, saying, “Answerest thou the high priest so?” The reprimand was harsh, but it must be owned, that the answer of Christ was but little respectful to a man, invested with authority and the right of putting questions, in order to discover the truth from the mouth of the accused. Jesus ought to have been better acquainted with his own doctrine than the peasants of Galilee or Judea, before whom he had through preference affected to preach in an unintelligible manner. It was therefore very just and natural to suppose, that Jesus could give a better account of his true sentiments and eternal parables than an ignorant multitude, who had listened without being ever able to comprehend him. Jesus alone believed to possess the secret of uniting into system the scattered and unconnected principles of his heavenly doctrine. (1)

Caiphas, unable to draw any thing from the accused, waited till next morning, when the council would assemble, in order to continue this inquest. Christ ap-

appeared before the Sanhedrim, that is, before the most respectable tribunal in the nation. The gospel represents the priests and chiefs of the Jews occupied during the whole night that Jesus was arrested, in searching for and suborning *false witnesses* against him. They produce two persons, on whom they very unjustly bestow this epithet. These witnesses indeed depose to a fact verified by the gospel itself. "We heard him say," affirm they, "that he would destroy the temple, and rebuild it in three days." It is at least certain, that Jesus had uttered these words, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." (2) But the poor witnesses knew not that he then spoke in his figurative style. Their mistake was pardonable, for, according to the gospel, the apostles themselves did not penetrate the true sense of these words till after the resurrection of their master.

This evidence was not sufficient to condemn Jesus to death. The Jews, however iniquitous we may suppose them to have been, did not sentence fools to die; and these words of Christ must have appeared to them the mere effect of delirium. Accordingly the high priest contented himself with asking, what he had to answer: and as the accused refused to speak, he did not farther insist on it.

He passed then to questions more serious, "Are you the Christ?" says he to Jesus. How does our man answer this question? "If I tell it you, you will not believe me, and you will not suffer me to

(2) St Mat. xxvi. 61. St Mark xiv. 58. St John ii. 19--21

“depart. . . But hereafter the Son of man shall sit
 “on the right hand of God.”—You are then the
 “Son of God,” continues the priest. — “You
 “have said it,” replies the accused. “But it is
 “not sufficient that we should say it: it is you,
 “who are to answer; once more, Are you the
 “Christ? I conjure you by the living God tell us, if
 “you are his Son.” “You have said it,” answered
 “Jesus: “The son of man,” (that is, the Son of God)
 “shall one day come in the clouds of heaven.” Not-
 withstanding these perplexed answers the judges ima-
 gined, they understood the meaning of his words; and
 they plainly perceived, that he wished to give himself
 out for *the Son of God*. “He hath spoken blasphemy,”
 said they; and immediately concluded, that he deserv-
 ed death (3)—a judgement which was valid according
 to the law of the Jews, and which must also appear
 so to Christians, whose sanguinary laws punish with
 death those whom the clergy accuse of blasphemy.

The Christians have therefore no right to blame
 the conduct of the Jews, so often imitated by ecclesiastical and secular tribunals. On the other hand, if it
 was necessary that Christ should die, if he wished it,
 if the reprobation of the Jews was resolved on, Jesus
 acted very properly in keeping them in error. But if
 this was the intention of Providence, why preach to
 them? Why perform miracles before a whole people,
 whilst a small number were only to profit by it? Did
 Jesus wish to save them? In that case why not con-
 vince the whole Sanhedrim of his power? Why did
 he not burst his bonds? Why did he not by a single
 word change their obstinate hearts? Did he wish to

destroy them ? Why not then strike them dead ? Why not instantly precipitate them into hell ?

The judges doubtless did not comprehend, why an accused person, who could not extricate himself from their hands could be the Son of God. They accordingly condemned him, that is, declared him worthy of death ; but not definitively, as it was requisite that the sentence should be approved of, and executed by the Romans, sovereigns of the nation. During these transactions, Jesus was treated in the cruellest manner by the Jews, whom, as well as Christians, zeal permitted, or rather enjoined, to be savage.

It is during this night, and the morning of the following day so fatal to the Saviour of the world, that we must place the three denials of St Peter, the chief of the apostles ; yet for him his master had prayed. His comrades, seized with dismay, had dispersed themselves in Jerusalem and its neighbourhood. Several among them would have acted like St Peter, if they had found themselves in a similar situation. He had at least the merit of keeping near his master ; he abjured him, it is true, but would it have been of more avail, if, by acknowledging him openly, Peter should have entangled himself in a very scurvy affair, without being in a condition to relieve the Saviour.

The Sanhedrim repaired to the palace of Pilate, the Roman governor, in order to get the sentence confirmed. Jesus was conducted thither. Pilate instantly perceived, that it was an affair in which fanaticism

and folly had the greatest share. Filled with contempt for so ridiculous a motive, he testified at first unwillingness to meddle in it. *Judge him yourselves*, said he to the magistrates. Hereupon the latter themselves became false witnesses. Zeal, no doubt, made them imagine, that every thing was allowable against an enemy of religion. They interested the sovereign power in their quarrel—They accused Jesus of wishing “to make himself king of the Jews,” and of having maintained, that “they ought not to pay tribute to Cæsar.” We recognise here the genius of the clergy, who, to ruin their enemies, are never very fastidious in the choice of means. They especially strive to render the latter suspected by the temporal power, in order to engage it, through motives of self-interest, to revenge their injuries, or satiate their passions.

Pilate could not dispense with paying attention to accusations of so serious a nature. Unable to persuade himself, that the man he beheld could have conceived projects so ridiculous, he interrogates him:—“Are you the king of the Jews?” On which Jesus in his turn interrogates Pilate, and demands, “Say you this of yourself, or have others told it you?”—“Of what consequence is it to me,” returns Pilate, “that you pretend to be the king of the Jews? You do not appear to be a man much to be dreaded by the Emperor my master—I am not of your nation; I concern myself very little with your silly quarrels. Your priests are your accusers—I have my own opinion of them—but they accuse you; they deliver

"you into my hands—Tell me then, What have you done?" Jesus might very easily have brought himself off in this affair; but in the distress he was, his judgment began to wander; and, far from penetrating the favourable disposition of Pilate, who wished to save him, he replied, "that his kingdom was not of this world—that he was the truth," &c. On this the Governor asks him, What is the truth? But the Saviour makes no reply, altho' the question well deserved a categorical answer.

Pilate, a little alarmed on account of Jesus, declared, that he "found nothing in him worthy of death." But this redoubled the cries of his enemies. Having learned that the accused was a Galilean, to get quit of the ridiculous business he seized the opportunity to send him to Herod, to whose tetrarchate Jesus originally belonged. We have said elsewhere, that this Prince had desired to see our hero, and his desire was now gratified. But he conceived a sovereign contempt for him, on seeing his obstinacy and constant refusal to answer the questions put to him. To Pilate therefore he sent him back clothed in a white robe by way of derision. The governor however saw no capital crime in Jesus, and wished to save him; besides his superstitious wife had a dream, that interested her in favour of our missionary. (4) — Pilate said therefore to the Jews, that he could find nothing in the man, which rendered him worthy of death. But the people misled, and wishing him to be crucified, cried out, *Tolle, tolle*, away, away with him. Hereupon the Governor devised another plan to save him. I

"release," said he, "every year a criminal, supposing that Jesus may be culpable, I am going to set him free." The cries were redoubled, and the Jews demanded, that a robber called Barrabas should profit of this mercy in preference to Jesus, whose punishment they persisted to urge.

The Roman, desirous to calm the rage of a fanatical people, caused Jesus to be whipped. Thereafter they dressed him in a ridiculous manner, crowned him with thorns,* and made him hold a reed instead of a sceptre; after which Pilate shewed him to the people in this condition, saying to them, "Behold your king! are you not yet satisfied? See how to please you I have bedecked him. Be then less cruel: do not carry farther your indignation; he ought no longer to give you umbrage."

The priests, whose custom it is never to forgive, were not moved by this spectacle; it was only the death of their enemy that could satisfy them. They shifted their attacks, and to intimidate the governor, gave him to understand, that by suffering the accused to live he betrayed the interests of his master. It was then that Pilate, fearing the effects of the malice of the clergy, remitted Jesus to the Jews, allowed them to satisfy their rage on him, and execute their projects; declaring, however, that "he washed his hands of it," and that it was against his opinion, if they should put him to death. One cannot well conceive how a Roman governor, who exercised sovereign power in Ju-

dea, could yield so easily to the wishes of the Jews : but one cannot more easily conceive, how God has permitted this honest governor to become through weakness an accomplice in the death of his dear Son. (5)

Jesus, abandoned to the rage of devotees, again suffered the cruellest treatment. Pilate, to humble those barbarians, wished the label affixed to the upper part of the cross to bear, that he was their king ; and nothing could induce him to recede from this resolution. "What is written is written," said he to those, who requested him to alter an inscription * dishonourable to their nation. It is also proper to observe, that this inscription is differently expressed by the four evangelists.

The Jews treated Christ as a king dethroned, and made him experience the most bloody outrages. Although he had said that, if he were inclined, he could make *legions of angels* come to his protection, yet the Jews, notwithstanding their natural credulity, paid no credit to his assertion, and nothing could stop their religious cruelty, excited by the priests. They made him take the road to Calvary. Christ sunk under the weight of his cross †, but they loaded with it one Simon more vigorous than him ; the unfortunate Jesus must have been indeed much enfeebled by what he had suffered during both the night and the morning.

At last Christ was placed on the cross, the usual punishment of slaves. He did not long suffer under the agonies of crucifixion: after invoking his Father, and lamenting his being so shamefully abandoned, he expired, it is said, between two thieves. Here it is proper to remark, that the Holy Ghost, who inspired St Mark, makes Jesus die at the third hour, that is, at nine o'clock in the morning, whilst the Holy Ghost, who in like manner inspired St John, makes Jesus die *at the sixth hour*, that is, at mid-day. (6) The Holy Ghost is not more consistent in the story of the two thieves, in whose company Jesus was crucified. St Matthew and St Mark tell us, that the two thieves, nailed to the cross with Jesus, insulted him with abusive language; while St Luke assures us, that one only of the two injured the Saviour, and that the other reprimanded his comrade for his insolence, and besought Jesus "to remember him when he should come to his kingdom." (7) But our interpreters have a thousand secrets for proving, that the Holy Ghost never contradicts himself, even when he speaks in the most contradictory manner; those who have faith are satisfied with their arguments, which do not impress so powerfully the freethinkers, who have the misfortune to reason.

The remorse of Judas soon revenged Jesus on this traitor. He restored to the priests the thirty pieces he had received from them, and went away forthwith to hang himself. (8) According to St Matthew, the

(6) St Mark xv. 25. and St John xix. 14.

selling of Jesus for thirty pieces had been foretold by Jeremiah : it must however be observed, that the prediction does not appear in the writings of this prophet, which would create a suspicion, that the Evangelists, little satisfied with applying to Christ some prophecies, such as they are extant in the Old Testament, have besides taken the liberty of drawing from their own store, or forging them when in need. But our able interpreters are not at all embarrassed with this ; and a holy blindness will always hinder these bagatelles from being seen.

The gospel informs us, that at the death of Christ all nature seemed to take part in the grand event. At the moment he expired, there was a total eclipse ; a frightful shaking of the earth was felt ; several holy personages came out of their tombs to take a walk on the streets of Jerusalem. The Jews alone had the misfortune to see none of all this ; it appears, that these wonders were performed only in the fancy of the disciples of Jesus. As for the eclipse, of which the gospel speaks, it was doubtless an inconceivable prodigy, which could not have taken place without a total derangement in the machine of the world. A total eclipse of the sun during full moon, the time at which the celebration of the passover was fixed by the Jews, is of all miracles the most impossible. Besides, contemporary authors have not mentioned it, although this phenomenon well merited to be transmitted to posterity. (9) The incredulous maintain, that there was no eclipse on this occasion, but of the common sense of those who saw all these marvels, or of the good

faith of the writers who have attested them. With respect to the shaking of the earth, they suspect also, that the apostles of Jesus, benumbed with fear at the sight of their divine master's fate, were the only persons who felt it; in this way indeed the thing becomes very probable.

When Jesus was dead, or believed to be so, after an incision had been made in his side *, from which came blood and a whitish fluid, which they took for water; his body was embalmed, interred, and deposited in a tomb; this was done on Friday evening. (10) He had, it is said, several times intimated, that he would rise again the third day, that is, at the end of three days and three nights. Yet on the Sunday following, early in the morning, the tomb, wherein he had been laid, was found empty.—The Jews, always opiniative, did not believe on this account, that he was risen again. They found it more natural to believe that he had failed in his word; or to suppose, that his disciples had found means to carry him off. This could easily have been executed by main force, by bribing the guards, whom the priests and Pharisees had placed around his sepulchre, or by cunning. As Pilate took but little interest in the matter, we do not find, that he punished the guards for neglecting to take care of what he had confided to them, merely from compliance to the fears of the Jews, which appeared to him very ridiculous. The idolatrous governor, but little acquainted with the resources or designs of the apostles, never suspected they could persuade any person, that a man, whose death was well at-

tested could return to life. It was however on this marvellous notion, as we will see, that a sect was afterwards founded, powerful enough to subject by degrees the Roman empire and a considerable portion of the globe. (11)

On the other hand, the punishment of our hero must have produced very little sensation in the world, and his adventures must have been strangely unknown, since we do not find that any historian, with the exception of the evangelists, makes mention of them. (12)

 CHAPTER SIXTEENTH.

RESURRECTION OF JESUS,---HIS CONDUCT UNTIL HIS ASCENSION,---EXAMINATION OF THE PROOFS OF THE RESURRECTION.

THE history of the life of an ordinary man terminates commonly with his death; but it is different with a Man-God, who has the power of raising himself from the dead, or whom his adherents have the faculty of making rise at will. This has happened to Jesus: thanks to his apostles or evangelists, we see him still playing a considerable part even after his decease.

The moment Christ was arrested, his disciples, as we have seen, dispersed themselves in Jerusalem and the neighbourhood, with the exception of Simon Peter, who did not lose sight of him during his examination at the house of the high priest. It appears, this apostle, for his own interest, was anxious to know the result of it. Encouraging themselves on finding that Jesus had not criminated them in his examinations, the disciples re-assembled, concerted measures, and determined, as their master was dead, or reputed so, to take advantage of the notions which he had diffused during his mission. Accustomed to lead for so long a period a wandering life under his command,

and subsist at the expence of the public by means of preaching, exorcisms, and miracles, they resolved to continue a profession more easily exercised, and incomparably more lucrative, than their original trades. They had enjoyed an opportunity of observing, that it was better to catch men than fish. But how could the disciples of a man, who was punished as an impostor, make themselves be listened to? It was necessary therefore to give out, that their master, having during his life raised others from the dead, had after his own death, in virtue of his omnipotence, raised himself. The gospel moreover affirms, that Jesus had predicted it; necessary therefore it was to accomplish the prediction. The honour of the master and his disciples thereby acquired a new lustre; and the sect, far from seeing itself annihilated or disgraced, was enabled to acquire new partizans in this credulous nation.

In consequence of this reasoning, the good apostles had only to make the body of their master, dead or alive, to disappear, who, if he had remained in the tomb, would have bore evidence against them. They did not even wait till the three days and three nights in the pretended prophecy were expired. The dead body disappeared on the second day; and thus the second day after his decease, our hero, triumphing over death, found himself revived. (1)

If Christ was not yet dead of his punishment, his resurrection has nothing surprising in it. If he was actually dead, the cave, where his body was deposited, might possibly have secret passages, through which

they could enter and come out, without being observed or stopt by the enormous stone, with which they had affected to block up its entrance, and near which the guards had been placed. Thus the dead body might have been carried off either by force or by stratagem; and perhaps it had never been deposited in the tomb in question. In whatever manner the affair may have been transacted, a report was circulated, that Jesus was risen, and his body not to be found.

Nothing is of more importance to a Christian, than to ascertain satisfactorily the resurrection of Christ. St Paul tells us, that "if Jesus be not risen, our hope is vain." Indeed without this miracle of Omnipotence, intended to manifest to us the superiority of Christ over other men, and the interest the Deity took in his success, Jesus must appear to our eyes only as an adventurer, or weak fanatic, punished for having given umbrage to the priests of his country.

It is therefore necessary to examine seriously a fact, on which alone the belief of every Christian is founded. To do this it is necessary to satisfy ourselves of the quality of the witnesses who attest the fact. It is necessary to ascertain whether these witnesses be acute, disinterested, and intelligent persons. It is necessary to examine, if they agree among themselves in the narratives they give, or in the circumstances they relate. Such are the precautions usually employed to discover the degree of probability or evidence of facts, and which we propose to ourselves. These precautions are also infinitely more necessary, when it is in-

tended to examine *supernatural* facts, which, to be believed, require proofs much stronger than ordinary facts. On the unanimous testimony of some historians, I readily believe that Cæsar made himself master of Gaul; the circumstances of his conquest would be to me less evidently established, were I to find them related by himself only, or his adherents. These circumstances would appear to me incredible, if I found in them prodigies or facts contrary to the order of nature; and then I would have reason to believe, that they wanted to impose on me; or if I judged more favourably of the authors, who transmitted these facts, I would regard them as enthusiasts and fools:

Agreeably to those principles adopted by sound criticism, let us consider, who are the witnesses, that attest the marvellous, and consequently the least probable fact, which history can produce. They are apostles. But who are these apostles? They are adherents of Jesus. Were these apostles enlightened men? Every thing proves, that they were ignorant and rude, and that an indefatigable credulity was the most prominent trait in their character. Did they behold with their eyes Jesus rising from the dead?—No;—No one with his own eyes beheld this great miracle. The apostles themselves did not see their master coming out of the tomb; they merely found, that his tomb was empty, but this by no means proves, that he had risen. It will however be said, the apostles saw him afterwards, and conversed with him, and that he likewise shewed himself to some women, who knew him very well: But these apostles and these women, have they seen

distinctly ? Has not their prepossessioned imaginations made them see what did not exist ? In fine, is it absolutely certain that their master was dead before they laid him in the tomb ?

In the *second* place, Were these witnesses disinterested ? The apostles and disciples of Jesus were doubtless interested in the glory of the master they had followed during the course of his mission. Their interests were confounded with those of a man, who enabled them to subsist without toil. Several among them expected to be recompensed for their attachment to him by the favours which he would bestow upon them in the kingdom he was about to establish. Finding these hopes destroyed by the death, real or supposed, of their chief, most of the apostles, persuaded that all was over, lost courage ; but others less daunted conceived, that it was not necessary *to throw the handle after the hatchet* ; that they might profit still by the impressions which the preaching of Christ and his wonders had made on the people. They believed, that their master might again return, or if they supposed him dead, they could feign, that he had foretold he would rise again. They therefore agreed, that it was proper to circulate the report of his resurrection, to say that they had seen him, and to assert that Jesus had triumphantly come out of the tomb, which would appear very credible in the case of a personage, who had evinced himself capable of raising others from the dead. Knowing the imbecillity of the persons they had to deal with, they presumed, that the people were long before hand prepared to believe the marvel they in-

tended to announce. In fine, they conceived, that in order to subsist it was necessary to continue preaching the doctrine of a man, who would not have attracted an audience, if it had not been taken for granted that he was risen again. They felt that it was necessary to preach the resurrection of Christ, or consent to perish with hunger. They foresaw, moreover, that it was necessary to brave chastisement and even death, rather than renounce an opinion or doctrine, on which their daily subsistence and welfare absolutely depended. Hence unbelievers conclude, that our witnesses of the resurrection of Christ were any thing but disinterested in supporting this fact, and were spurred on by the principle, that he who risks nothing gains nothing:

In the *third* place; Are the witnesses of the resurrection of Christ unanimous in their evidences or relations? Much more, Are they consistent with themselves in the narratives they give? We find neither the one nor the other. Altho' Jesus, according to some Evangelists, had announced in the most positive manner, that he must rise again, (2) St John makes no mention of this prediction, but expressly declares, that the disciples of Jesus, *knew not that he must rise again from the dead*: (3) This denotes in them a total ignorance of that great event, said, however, to have been announced by their master. This circumstance may create a suspicion, that these predictions of Christ have been piously invented afterwards, and inserted in pro-

(1) St Matt. xxvi, 32, St Mark, xvi, 28,

(3) St John, xi. 9,

cess of time into the text of St Matthew, St Mark, and St Luke. Yet nothing can be more positive than the manner in which St Matthew speaks of this prediction; he supposes it so well known by the public, that he affirms, the priests and Pharisees went to Pilate, and told him, *We remember, this deceiver said, while he was yet alive, that after three days he would rise again.* (4) We do not however find in any of the Evangelists a passage, where this resurrection is foretold in so public and decided a manner. St Matthew himself relates only the answer of Jesus to those, who demanded of him a sign; it consists, as we have elsewhere said, in referring them to, "Jonas, who was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale; so," said he, "shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." (5) Now Jesus, having died on Friday at the ninth hour or mid-day, and risen again the second day early in the morning, was not, as we have already remarked, "three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." Besides, the manner in which Christ expresses himself in this pretended prediction, related by St Matthew, is not sufficiently clear to enable the priests and Pharisees to conclude from such obscure language, that Jesus must die and rise again; or to excite their alarm, unless it is pretended, that on this occasion these enemies of Christ received by a particular revelation the interpretation of the mysterious prediction.

(4) St Matt, xxvii, 63,

(5) St Matt, xii, 38, &c,

St John tells us, that when Jesus was taken down from the cross by Joseph of Arimathea, Nicodemus, in order to embalm him, brought a mixture of aloes and myrrh, weighing about a hundred pounds, and that afterwards he took the body of Jesus, wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, furnished spices according to the custom practised by the Jews in their funeral ceremonies, and laid it in the tomb. (6) Thus was Jesus embalmed; carried away, and buried. On the other hand, St Matthew and St Luke tell us, that this sepulture and embalming were performed in presence of Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Jesus; (7) who, consequently, behoved to know, what Nicodemus had done; yet St Mark, soon forgetting all this, tells us, that these same women *brought sweet spices* (aromatics) *in order to embalm his body*, and came for that purpose early in the morning of the day subsequent to the Sabbath. (8) St Luke has no better memory, and informs us, that these ladies came also to embalm a dead body, which, according to St John, had already received a *hundred pounds weight* of aromatics, and was inclosed in a sepulchre, the entrance of which was blocked up by a massy stone. It appears, the women were embarrassed at finding the stone, as the incredulous are with these contradictions of our evangelists. (9)

(6) St John, xix. 39--40

(7) St Matt. xxvii. 61. St Mark xv. 47. St Luke xxii. 55

(8) St Mark xvi. 1.

(9) St Luke xxiv. 1.

These ladies, however, who dreaded the obstacle of the stone, did not dread the obstacle of the guard, which St Matthew places at the entrance of the tomb. But if these women knew, that Christ was to rise again at the end of three days, was there so much need of embalming his body?—unless we suppose, that Jesus made a secret to his mother and the tender Magdalene of an event, which, it is asserted, was publicly predicted, and which was perfectly well known not only by his disciples, but also by the priests and Pharisees, of whose extraordinary precautions St Matthew informs us.

According to this evangelist, these precautions were founded on the fear the priests were under, that the disciples of Jesus “should come and carry away his body, and afterwards say unto the people, that he is risen from the dead; an error, which, in their opinion, would be more dangerous than the first.” Nevertheless we find some women and disciples continually roaming about the tomb, going and coming freely, and offering to embalm twice the same dead body. It must be acknowledged, that all this surpasses human understanding. (10)

It is not more easy to conceive the conduct of the guards placed near the tomb at the solicitation of the priests, and that of the priests themselves. According to St Matthew, these guards, terrified at the resurrection of Christ, run to Jerusalem to tell the priests,

(10) St Matt. xxvii, 64---66

"that the angel of the Lord had descended from heaven, and taken away the stone, which blocked up the tomb ;* and that at sight of him they had nearly expired through fear." The priests thereupon, not at all doubting the truth of the relation of the guards, enjoined them to say publicly, that the disciples of Jesus had carried away his body during the night, and while they were asleep. They also gave the soldiers money to speak in this manner, and promised to pacify the governor, if he wished to punish them for their negligence. (11)

On this narrative it is proper to observe, that the guards did not say, they had seen Jesus rise from the dead ; they pretend merely to have seen "the angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, and rolling away the stone, which was at the entrance of the tomb." Thus this history announces *an apparition* only, and not *a resurrection*. One might explain it in a manner natural enough by saying, that during the night, while the guards were buried in sleep, the adherents of Jesus might have come by the light of flambeaus, with an armed force to open the tomb, and intimidate the soldiers taken at unawares, who in the alarm they experienced, imagined they had seen their prey taken out of their hands by a preternatural power, and that they afterwards affirmed all this in order to justify themselves.

The most singular circumstance is the conduct of the priests, who believe in earnest the relation of the

X

(11) St Matt. xxviii.

guards, and consequently give credit to a miracle strong enough to convince them of the power of Jesus. But far from being moved by the prodigy, which they thus believe, they give money to the soldiers to engage them to tell, not the incident as it occurred, but that the disciples of Jesus came by night to take away the body of their master. On the other hand, the guards, who must have been more dead than alive through terror at the spectacle they had witnessed, accept money for publishing a falsehood: a conduct for which the angel of the Lord might very properly have punished them. Far, however, from dreading punishment, for a sum of money our soldiers consent to betray their conscience. But further, could the Jewish priests, however base we may suppose them, be silly enough to imagine, that these men, after having witnessed so terrible a miracle, would be very faithful in preserving the secret? In short, it must have been an insignificant miracle, which could make an impression neither on the soldiers who had seen it, nor on the priests who believed it on the relation of these soldiers. If the priests were convinced of the reality of the miracle, was it not natural, that they should recognise Jesus for the Messiah, and that they should unite with him, in labouring to deliver their country from the yoke of idolaters?

On this occasion indeed, the angel of the Lord seems to have bungled the affair by so terrifying the soldiers, that they fled without having time to see Jesus rising from the dead, whose resurrection however was the object of all this pompous preparation. Very

far from that, this awkward angel chases away the guards, who ought to have been the witnesses of the mighty wonder.

It appears in general, that the transaction of Jesus' resurrection was seen by nobody. His disciples did not see it; the soldiers, who guarded his tomb, did not see it; in fine, the priests and Jews did not hold this fact to be so memorable as some persons, who beheld no part of it. It was only after his resurrection, that Jesus shewed himself. But to whom did he shew himself? To disciples interested in saying, that he was risen again; to women, who to the same interest joined also weak minds, and ardent imaginations, disposed to form phantoms and chimeras.

These reflections suffice to enable us to judge of all the pretended appearances of Jesus after his resurrection. Besides our evangelists are not unanimous as to these appearances. St Matthew relates, that Jesus shewed himself to Mary Magdalene and the other Mary; while St John makes mention of Mary Magdalene singly. St Matthew tells us, that Jesus shewed himself to the two Maries on the road, whilst returning from the sepulchre on purpose to relate to the disciples what they had seen. St John informs us, that Mary Magdalene, after visiting the sepulchre, went and carried the news to the disciples, and thereafter returned to this same sepulchre, where she beheld Jesus in the company of angels. St Matthew relates, that the two Maries embraced the feet of Jesus. St John says, Jesus forbade Magdalene to touch him. St Mat-

thence informs us, Jesus bade the two Marias tell his disciples, *that he was going into Galilee*. St John says, Jesus ordered Mary to acquaint his disciples, *that he was going to his Father*; that is, to heaven.— This detail suffices to shew us, how far the evangelists agree as to the appearance of Jesus to the holy dames. But it is more singular still, that, according to St Mark, the disciples themselves were not inclined to credit the apparition of Christ to Magdalene; according to St Luke, they treat as reveries all that she told them of angels. In fine, according to St John, Magdalene herself did not at first believe, that she had seen her adorable lover, whom she took for the gardener: (12)

We do not find greater certainty in the apparition of Jesus to St Peter and St John. These two apostles went to the sepulchre, but they did not find their dear master. According to St John, he himself saw neither Jesus nor the angels. From St Luke it appears, that these apostles arrived after the angels were gone; and from St John, before the angels had arrived. Our witnesses are indeed very little unanimous as to these angels, who seem to have been seen only by the good ladies, whom they charged to announce to the disciples the resurrection of Jesus. St Matthew makes mention of one angel only, whom St Mark calls *a young man*. St John affirms, that there were two.

(12) St Matt, xxviii. St John, xx. St Luke, xxiv. 11.
St Mark xvi.

It is said, that Jesus shewed himself again to two disciples of Emaus called *Simon and Cleophas*; but they did not recognise him, altho' they had lived familiarly with him. They proceeded a long while in his company, without suspecting he was their man—a circumstance which, undoubtedly, evinces a very strange failure of memory. It is true, St Luke tells us, that their *eyes were as if shut*. Is it not very singular, that Jesus should shew himself in order not to be known again? they however recognised him afterwards; but immediately dreading, as it would seem, to be seen too nearly, the phantom disappeared. Our two disciples went immediately, and announced the news to their brethren assembled at Jerusalem, where Jesus arrived fully as soon as they.

St Matthew, St Mark, and St Luke, agree in telling us, that when the disciples were informed of the resurrection of Jesus, they saw him for the first and last time: But the author of the Acts of the Apostles, St John, and St Paul, contradict this assertion, for they speak of several other appearances, which afterwards occurred. St Matthew and St Mark inform us, that the disciples received orders to go and join Jesus in Galilee; but St Luke, and the author of the Acts, (that is the same St Luke,) says, that the disciples were ordered not to go out of Jerusalem. With respect to this last apparition, St Matthew places it on a *mountain in Galilee*, where Jesus had fixed the rendezvous for the evening of the day of his resurrection; whilst St Luke informs us, that this apparition was made at Jerusalem, and tells us, that immediately

thereafter he ascended into heaven, and disappeared for ever. Yet the author of the Acts of the Apostles is not of this opinion; he maintains (against himself, St Luke), that Jesus tarried still forty days with his disciples in order to instruct them.

There still remain to be considered two appearances of Jesus to his apostles, the one whereat Thomas was not present, and refused to believe those who assured him of their having seen their master, and the other when Thomas recognised his master, who shewed him his wounds. To render one of these apparitions more marvellous, they assure us, that Jesus was seen in the midst of his disciples, *whilst the doors were shut*. But this will not appear surprising to those, who know that Christ after his resurrection had an *immaterial* or *incorporeal* body, which consequently could make itself a passage thro' the smallest orifices. His disciples took him for a *spirit*: Yet this *spirit* had wounds, was palpable, and took food. But perhaps all this was only chimerical, and those apparitions mere illusions of sense. Indeed, how could the apostles be assured of the reality of what they saw? A being, who has the power of changing the course of nature, can destroy all the rules by which we judge of certainty: and on this supposition, the apostles could never be certain of having seen Christ after his resurrection.

St John speaks of several appearances of Jesus to his disciples, of which no mention is made by the other evangelists: hence we see, that his testimony destroys theirs, or that theirs destroys his. As to the appari-

tions of Jesus, which St Paul mentions, he was not a witness of them, and knew them only by hearsay ; and we find him accordingly speaking of them in a manner very little exact. He says, for example, that Jesus shewed himself " to the twelve," while it is evident, that, by the death of Judas, the apostolic college was reduced to eleven. One is surprised to see these inaccuracies in an inspired author ; they may render suspicious what he likewise says of the apparition of Jesus, to five hundred of the brethren at once. (13) As to himself we know, that he never saw his master but in a vision : and considering the testimonies, on which the resurrection of Jesus is founded, perhaps one may say as much of the other apostles and disciples. They were Jews, enthusiasts, and prophets ; and consequently subject to dreaming even while awake. The incredulous consider this to be the most favourable opinion they can form of witnesses, who attest the resurrection of the Saviour, on which the Christian religion is solely established.

It appears indeed most certain from the nature of the testimonies which we have examined, that Providence has in a singular manner neglected to give to an event, so memorable and of such great importance, the authenticity it seemed to require. Laying aside faith, which never experiences a difficulty about proofs, no man can believe facts, even the most natural, from vouchers so faulty, proofs so weak, relations so contradictory, and testimonies so suspicious as those,

which the evangelists furnish us on the most incredible and marvellous fact that ever was related. Independent of the visible interest these historians had in establishing the belief of the resurrection of their master, and which ought to put us on our guard against them, they seem to have written merely to contradict one another, and reciprocally weaken their testimonies. To adopt relations, in which one finds only a tissue of inconclusiveness, contradictions, improbable facts, and absurdities, calculated to destroy all confidence in history, requires indeed grace from above. Yet Christians do not for a moment doubt of the resurrection, and their belief in this respect is founded on *a rock*, that is, according to infidels, on prejudices they have never examined, and to which, from early infancy, their spiritual guides have prudently attached the greatest importance. They teach them to immolate reason, judgment, and good sense, on the altar of faith. After this sacrifice, it is no longer difficult to make them acknowledge, without enquiry, the most palpable absurdities for truths, on which it is not permitted to be sceptical.

It is in vain, that people of sense prove the falsity of these pretended truths ; it is in vain, that an intelligent critic stands up against interested testimonies, visibly suggested by enthusiasm and imposture ; it is in vain, that humanity exclaims against wars, massacres, and horrors without number, which absurd disputes on absurd dogmas have occasioned. They silence people by saying, that it is written, " I will destroy the " wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nought the

“understanding of the prudent.—Where is the wise?
 “Where are the scribes? (the doctors of the law)
 “Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world
 “by causing the foolishness of the gospel to be preach-
 “ed.” (14) It is by such declamations against rea-
 son and wisdom, that fanatics and impostors have suc-
 ceeded in banishing good sense from the earth, and fa-
 shioning for themselves slaves, who make a merit of
 subjecting reason to faith, that is, of extinguishing a
 sacred torch, which would conduct us with certainty,
 on purpose to lead us astray in the darkness our inte-
 rested guides know how to infuse into minds. To de-
 grade reason is an outrage against God, its supposed
 author; and it is an outrage against man, who is there-
 by reduced to the condition of brutes.

These reflections will enable us to ascertain the de-
 gree of belief, which the dogma of the resurrection of
 Jesus deserves. It is only attested by men, whose sub-
 sistence depended on that absurd romance; *and as ro-
 guery continually belies itself*, these lying witnesses
 could not agree among themselves in their evidences.
 They tell us, that Jesus had predicted publicly his
 own resurrection; he ought therefore to have risen a-
 gain publicly; he ought to have shown himself, not in
 secret to his disciples, whose testimony could only be
 suspicious, but openly to priests, Pharisees, doctors,
 and men of understanding, especially after having inti-
 mated, that it was the *only sign which would be given
 them*. Was it not acknowledging the falsehood of his

mission, to refuse the sign, by which he had solemnly promised to prove the truth of that mission? Was it reasonable to require the Jews to believe, on the word of his disciples, a fact, of which he could have convinced them with their own eyes? In fine, how is it possible for rational persons of the present age to believe, after the lapse of eighteen hundred years, on the discordant testimony of four interested evangelists, fanatics or fabulists, a fact which they could not make be believed in their own time, except by a small number of imbecile people, incapable of reasoning, fond of the marvellous, and of too limited understandings to escape the snares laid for their simplicity. A Roman governor, a tetrarch, a Jewish high priest, converted by the apparition of Christ, would have made a greater impression on a man of good sense than a hundred secret apparitions to his chosen disciples. The conversion of the Sanhedrim of Jerusalem to the faith would have been of greater weight with us than all the obscure rabble, the apostles prevailed on to believe their improbable marvels, and persuaded that they had seen Christ alive after his death.

If the apparitions of Jesus to his apostles were not obviously fables invented by roguery, or adopted through enthusiasm and ignorance, the motive of these clandestine visits cannot be divined. Indeed, become incapable of suffering, re-established in his divine omnipotence, was he still afraid of the Jews? Could he dread being put to death a second time? By shewing himself, had he not better reason to flatter himself with

converting them, than he derived from all his sermons and miracles ?

It will perhaps be told us, the Jews by their opposition deserved to be rejected ; that the views of Providence were changed ; and God no longer wished, that the Jews should be converted. These answers are so many insults to the Divinity. 1st, How is it possible for men to withstand God ? Is it not to deny the Divine Omnipotence, to pretend, that man can oppose himself to its will ? Man, say you, is free ; but must not a God, who knew every thing, have foreseen, that the Jews would abuse their liberty by resisting his will ? In this case, why send them his Son ? Why make him suffer to no purpose an infamous and cruel death ? Why not send him at once to creatures disposed to hear him, and render him their homage ? In fine, to pretend that the views of Providence were changed, is it not to attack the divine immutability ? unless they mean to say, that the Deity had from all eternity resolved on this change—which however will not shelter that immutability.

Thus in whatever point of view we contemplate the matter, it will remain a decided fact, that the resurrection of Christ, far from being founded on solid proofs, unexceptionable testimony and respectable authority, is obviously established only on falsehood and knavery, pervading every page of the discordant relations of those who have pretended to vouch it.

After having made their hero revive and shew himself, one knows not how often, to his trusty disciples, it was necessary in the end to make him disappear altogether, that is, send him back to heaven, in order to conclude the romance. But our story-tellers are not more in union on this disappearance than on other things. They agree neither as to the time nor the place of Jesus' ascension. St Mark and St Luke inform us, that Christ, after having shewn himself to the eleven apostles, while they were at table, and spoken to them, ascended into heaven. St Luke however adds, that he conducted them out of Jerusalem as far as "Bethany; that there he lifted up his hands and "blessed them, and was afterwards carried up into "heaven." St Mark contradicts St Luke here, and makes Jesus ascend to heaven from Galilee; and as if he had seen what passed on high, places him on the right hand of God, who on this occasion yielded to him the place of honour. (15) St Matthew and St John do not speak of this ascension: If one referred it to them, he must presume, that Jesus is still on earth, for according to the first of these evangelists, his last words to his disciples gave them to understand, that "he would remain with them until the end of "the world." To fix our ideas on this subject St Luke tells us, as we have seen, that Jesus ascended into heaven the very evening of the day of the resurrection. But the same St Luke, who is supposed to be the author of the Acts of the Apostles, informs us, that Jesus tarried *forty days after his resurrection* with his dear disciples. Faith only can extricate us from this embarrassment. St John advances nothing on the mat-

ter, but leaves us in uncertainty as to the time which Jesus passed on earth after his resurrection. Some unbelievers, on observing the romantic style reigning in the gospel of this apostle, have concluded from the manner in which he finishes his history, that he meant to give free course to the fables, which afterwards might be published about Christ. He terminates his narrative with these words; "Jesus did also many other things, and if they should be written every one, I suppose, that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written:" and with this hyperbole, the well-beloved apostle finishes the Platonic romance which he has made on his master. (16)

CHAPTER SEVENTEENTH.

GENERAL REFLECTIONS ON THE LIFE OF CHRIST.—PREACH-
ING OF THE APOSTLES.—CONVERSION OF ST PAUL.

—ESTABLISHMENT OF CHRISTIANITY.—PER-
SECUTIONS IT SUFFERS.—CAUSES OF ITS
PROGRESS.

THE mere reading of the life of Jesus, such as we have presented it according to the monuments which Christians respect as inspired, must be sufficient to undeceive every thinking being. But it is the property of superstition to prevent thinking: it benumbs the soul, confounds the reason, perverts the judgment, renders doubtful the most obvious truths, and makes a merit with its slaves of despising enquiry, and of relying blindly on the word of those who govern them.—It is not unseasonable therefore to bring again under review some reflections, which may be useful to those readers, who have not courage to draw out of the enquiry we have made, the consequences which naturally result from it; and thus aid them in forming rational ideas of the Christ they adore, of his disciples whom they revere, and of books which they are accustomed to regard as sacred.

The examination we have made of the birth of Jesus ought to render it very suspicious. We have found the Holy Ghost mistaken on that important article of our hero's life; for he inspires two evangelists with two very different genealogies. Notwithstanding so striking a blunder, and the consanguinity of the virgin Mary, and Elizabeth, wife of the priest Zacharias, we will not cavil on these points. We will grant, that Mary might really be of the race of David; many examples demonstrate, that the branches of races more illustrious have fallen into misery. Departing also from the supposition, that Mary, the immaculate wife of Joseph, may have willingly yielded to the angel, or, simple and devout, may have been deceived by the angel, there is every reason to believe, that she taught her son afterwards his descent from David, and perhaps some marvellous circumstances which, by justifying the mother, might kindle the enthusiasm of the child. Thus Jesus might, at a very early age, be really persuaded both of his royal extraction, and of the wonders which had accompanied his birth. These ideas might inflame his ambition afterwards, and by degrees make him believe, that he was destined to play a grand part in his native country. Prepossessed with these sublime notions, he concluded with being convinced of their authenticity, and intoxicating himself more and more by the perusal of obscure prophecies, and the study of traditions spread abroad in his own country. It is then very possible, that our adventurer might have come to believe himself actually called by the Divinity, and pointed out by the prophets to be the reformer, the chief, and

the Messiah of Israel. In a word, he was a visionary, and found people silly enough to be caught by his reveries.

Another cause might likewise contribute to heat the brain of our missionary. Indeed some learned men, with much appearance of truth, have conjectured, that Jesus framed his morality, and acquired his knowledge in the house of a kind of monks or Jewish Cenobites, (friars) called Therapeutes or Essenians. We certainly find a striking conformity between what Philo tells us of these pious enthusiasts and the sublime precepts of our hero. The Therapeutes quitted father and mother, wife, children, and property, in order to apply themselves to contemplation. They explained the scripture in a manner purely allegorical—they abstained from all oaths—they lived in common—they suffered with resolution the misfortunes of life, and died with joy. (1) From all which it may be concluded, either that Christ had been a Therapeute before his preaching, or at least that he had borrowed their doctrines.

Be that as it may, in the midst of an ignorant and superstitious nation, perpetually fed with oracles and pompous promises; miserable at that time, and discontented with the Roman yoke; continually cajoled with the expectation of a deliverer, who was to restore them with honour; our enthusiast without difficulty found an audience, and by degrees adherents. Men are naturally disposed to listen to and believe those, who make them hope for an end to their miseries.

Misfortunes render man timorous and credulous; and lead him to superstition. A fanatic easily makes conquests among a wretched people. It is not then wonderful, that Jesus should very soon acquire partizans, especially among the populace, who in every country are easily seduced.

Our hero knew the weakness of his fellow-citizens. They wanted prodigies, and he in their eyes performed them. A stupid people, totally strangers to the natural sciences, to medicine, or to the resources of artifice, easily mistook very simple operations for miracles, and attributed to the finger of God effects, which might be owing to the knowledge Jesus had acquired during the long interval that preceded his mission.— Nothing in the world is more common than the combination of enthusiasm and imposture; the most sincere devotees often countenance frauds which they style pious, when they intend to advance what they believe to be the word of God, or to make religion prosper. Some very recent examples suffice to convince us, that the mixture of piety and knavery is by no means incompatible. We have seen all Paris running to see miracles, cures, and convulsions; and to hear sermons, which were obviously frauds, contrived by good souls with a view to support their party, which they styled the cause of God. There are but few zealous devotees who do not even think crimes allowable when the interests of religion are concerned. In religion, as at play, *one begins with being dupe, and ends with being knave.*

Thus, on considering things attentively, and weighing the particulars of the life of Christ, we must rest persuaded, that this man was a fanatic, who really thought himself inspired, favoured by Heaven, sent to his nation, and in a word, the Messiah;—that to support his divine mission, he made no difficulty to employ frauds the best calculated to succeed with a people, to whom miracles were absolutely necessary, and whom without miracles, the most eloquent harrangues, the wisest precepts, the most intelligent counsels, and the truest principles, could never have convinced.—In a word, a medley of enthusiasm and juggling appears to constitute the character of Jesus, and it is that of almost all spiritual adventurers who assume the character of Reformers, or become the chiefs of a sect.

We always find Christ, during his whole mission, preaching the kingdom of his Father, and supporting his preaching with wonders. At first he speaks only in a very reserved manner of his quality of Messiah, Son of God, and Son of David. There is prudence in not giving himself out for such—But he suffers the secret to be revealed by the mouth of the devil, to impose silence on whom he commonly takes great care,—but not until after the devil has spoken in a manner sufficiently intelligible to make an impression on the spectators. So that with the assistance of his possessed, his proselytes, or his convulsionaries, he procures testimonies in his behalf, which, from his own mouth, would have been very suspicious, and might have rendered him odious.

* Our able operator also took care to choose always his ground for performing miracles, and constantly refused to operate his wonders before persons whom he supposed inclined to criticise them. If he performed them sometimes in the synagogues, and in presence of the doctors, it was, according to appearance, in the certainty that the less fastidious populace, who believed in his miracles, would take his part, and defend him against the evil designs of the more acute spectators. (2)

The apostles of Jesus appear to have been men of their master's temper, that is, either credulous or misled enthusiasts or adroit cheats, or often both at once. There is every reason to believe, that Christ, who had skill in men, admitted into his intimate confidence those only in whom he remarked the most submissive credulity or the greatest address. On important occasions, such as the miracle of multiplying the loaves, the transfiguration, &c. we find, that he uses always the ministry of Peter, James, and John.

It is easy to conceive, that his disciples and adherents were much attached to him, either by the ties of interest or those of credulity. The most crafty perceived, that their fortune could only be ameliorated under the conduct of a man, who knew how to impose on the vulgar, and make his followers live at the expence of charitable devotees. Fishermen, obliged [formerly to subsist by a labour, painful and often attended with insuccess, conceived, that it was more advantageous to attach themselves to a missionary, who

without trouble made them live comfortably enough. The most credulous expected always to make a brilliant fortune, and occupy posts of eminence, in the new kingdom their chief intended to found.

The hopes and comforts of both vanished on the death of Jesus. The most pusillanimous lost courage completely, but the most able and subtle did not think themselves under the necessity of abandoning the party. They therefore contrived, as we have seen, the tale of the *resurrection*, by the aid of which both the reputation of their master and their own fortune were secured. Farther, it appears evident, these apostles never sincerely believed, that their master was a God. The Acts incontestibly demonstrate the contrary. The same Simon Peter, who had recognised Jesus for the Son of the living God, declares in his first sermon, that he was man. "Ye know," says he, "that Jesus of Nazareth was a man whom God hath rendered famous among you, — — — Yet ye have crucified him, — — — but God hath raised him up again," &c. This passage proves most clearly, that the chief of the apostles dared not yet hazard, or was wholly ignorant of the doctrine of the divinity of Jesus, which was afterwards contrived by the self-interest of the clergy, and adopted by the foolishness of Christians, whose credulity was never startled by the greatest absurdities; and self-interest and foolishness have perpetuated this doctrine until our time. By dint of repeating the same tales for so long a period, they have succeeded in making people believe the most ridiculous fables; the

religion of the children is always regulated by the fancy of their fathers. (3)

It appears however that the apostles of Jesus, deprived of the counsels of their master, would not have succeeded in procuring their doctrine to be adopted, if they had not found powerful succours after his death, and wisely selected for associates men more adroit than themselves, and better calculated for the business. They deliberated together on their common interests; it was then the Holy Ghost descended on them, that is, they considered on the means of earning a subsistence, gaining proselytes, and increasing the number of their adherents in order to secure themselves against the enterprises of the priests and grandees of the nation, whom the new sect might have very much displeased. The latter, little satisfied with having put Jesus to death, had also the imprudence to persecute his adherents. They engaged Herod to destroy James the brother of Christ; finally, they made Stephen be stoned,* who had the misfortune to fall into their hands. These priests and doctors did not perceive, that persecution is the surest method of spreading fanaticism; and that it always gives importance to the party persecuted.

This persecuting spirit, inherent in the clergy, served only to make new partisans to the persecuted sect. Bad treatment, imprisonments, and punishments, always render sectaries more obstinate, and interesting objects to those who witness their sufferings. Tor-

(3) Acts of the Apostles, ii. 21---25. See note 5th.

tures excite our pity in behalf of the person, who endures them. Every fanatic, that is punished, is certain of finding credulous friends, who aid him, because they persuade themselves, it is for religion he is persecuted.

The persecution, instigated by the priests, made also the new sectaries perceive, that it was of the utmost importance to them to unite their interests. They felt it necessary to avoid quarrels, and every thing which could create division; in a word, they lived in concord and peace.

The apostles, now become heads of the sect, neglected not their own interests. One of the first faculties with which the Holy Ghost inspired them, was to profit by devout souls, and engage them to place all their property in common. The apostles were the depositaries of these goods; and had under their orders ministers or servants, known by the name of deacons, and charged with the distribution of alms. There is every reason to believe, that these great saints did not forget themselves in such distributions. It appears also, that the law for this communion of goods was observed with rigour, as we find in the Acts of the Apostles Ananias and Saphira struck dead, on the prayer of St Peter, for having had the temerity to retain a portion of their own property:—a conduct which would appear as unjust as barbarous in any other person but an apostle of Christ. It must however be acknowledged, that the law, which obliged the rich to place their property in common,

was very important, not only to the apostles, but likewise for encreasing the sect and gaining partizans. The poor undoubtedly must have been eager to join a party, where the rich engaged to *lay the cloth* for the indigent. Hence it is easy to perceive, how this institution might, without a miracle, strengthen faith, and augment daily the number of the faithful.

Of all the recruits the new-born sect made, there was none superior to Saul, afterwards known by the name of St Paul. The actions and writings ascribed to him, exhibit him as an ambitious, active, intrepid, and opiniative man, susceptible of enthusiasm, and capable of inspiring others with it. Engaged at first in the profession of a tent-maker, it appears, that he attached himself afterwards to the service of Gamaliel a doctor of the law, and that he rendered services to the priests in the persecutions they made the Christians experience. There is however reason to believe, that the apostles feeling the utility, which a man of Saul's character might be of to the party, profited by some disgust he had taken, in order to draw him over to their sect; he consented, very readily conceiving that by the assistance of his talents, superior to those of his brethren, he might easily in the end succeed in placing himself at the head of a party, to which he knew the means of rendering himself necessary. He pretended therefore that his conversion was the effect of a miracle, and that God himself had called him. He caused himself be baptized at Damascus, joined the apostles at Jerusalem, was admitted a member of their college, and soon made them acquainted with his ta-

lents. (14) He betook himself to preaching Christ and his resurrection, and laboured in gaining over souls to him. His vehement zeal hurried him, without fear or hesitation, into quarrels with the priests, indignant at the conduct of the apostles; but his persecutions rendered him dearer to his party, of which he became from that time the prime mover and soul.

Often maltreated and banished by the Jews, he conjectured that it would perhaps be beneficial not to confine himself to them, but that conquests might likewise be made among the heathens. He no doubt knew very well, that mankind resemble each other considerably in all superstitions; that they are every where equally curious about marvels, susceptible of fanaticism, lovers of novelties, and easily deceived.— Paul, therefore, sometimes preached to the Jews, and sometimes, on their refusal, addressed himself to the Gentiles, among whom he succeeded in enlisting a considerable number of recruits.

Jesus, born in the bosom of Judaism, and knowing well the attachment of his fellow-citizens to the law of Moses, had always openly declared, that he was come to “accomplish, and not to destroy it.” His first apostles were, like himself, Jews, and frequently shewed themselves much attached to the rites of their religion. They took it amiss, that Paul their brother would not subject the profelytes he made among the Gentiles to Judaical usages. Filled with views more vast than those entertained by the other apostles,

he did not wish to disgust his new converts with inconvenient ceremonies, such as *circumcision* and abstinence from certain meats. The better to attain his ends, he thought it his duty to neglect usages, which he treated as bagatelles, while his brethren regarded them as most essential. (5) Paul endeavoured to prevail on them to hear reason: and it was on this occasion he resisted St Peter, who did not wish, that they should relax in articles important in his eyes.

This altercation produced a real schism. Paul left his brethren to preach the Judaical gospel or circumcision, whilst he preached his own in Asia Minor and in Greece, sometimes to the Hellenistic Jews, whom he found established there, and sometimes to the idolatrous Greeks, whose language, although unknown by the other apostles, Paul was acquainted with. His mission had a success, which far surpassed that of his brethren; in so much that we may fairly regard Paul as the true founder of the Christian religion, such as it is at this day. If we have recourse to the Acts of the Apostles, we perceive in this new preacher an activity, a warmth, a vehemence, and an enthusiasm well adapted to communicate itself. The missionaries, he formed, spread his doctrine to a great distance. The gospel of the apostle of the Gentiles prevailed over the gospel of the Judaizing apostles; and in a short time there were a great number of Christians in all the provinces of the Roman empire.

To a miserable people, crushed by tyrants and oppressors of every kind, the principles of the new sect

had powerful attractions. Its maxims, which tended to introduce equality and a community of goods, were calculated to seduce persons despised. Its promises flattered miserable fanatics, to whom, moreover, was announced the end of a perverse world, the approaching arrival of Jesus, and a kingdom wherein abundance and happiness would reign. To be admitted there they merely required of the proselytes "to believe in Jesus Christ, and be baptized." As for the austere maxims of the Christian sect, they were not of a nature to disgust miserables, accustomed from their situation to suffer, and to experience the want of the conveniences of life. Its dogmas, few in the beginning, were readily adopted by ignorant men, fond of wonders, whom their own mythology disposed to receive the fables of Christians: (6) besides, the preachers wrought miracles, which did not allow them to doubt of those said to have been performed by Jesus. There is therefore reason to presume, that different missionaries took care to compose, in emulation of one another, romances or histories of Christ, wherein they did not neglect to relate a great number of prodigies calculated to make their hero be revered, for whom they interested themselves in exciting the veneration of the faithful. In this manner the different collections, known by the name of *Gospels*, seem to have been framed, wherein, along with very simple facts, which might have really occurred, we find many relations that can appear credible only to enthusiasts and fools. These histories, composed by different hands, on traditions little uniform, and by authors of very different characters, are not much in harmony; hence the want of conformity in the relations of our evangelists,

which has been frequently noticed in the course of this work. There was, as we have elsewhere remarked, a vast number of gospels in the first ages of the church; and out of these the council of Nice chose four only, to which they gave the divine sanction.

We will not decide, whether these gospels really belong to the authors to whom they are ascribed. The opinion, which attributes them to their putative writers, might have been founded at first on some tradition, true or false, which existed in the time of the council of Nice, or which the fathers of that council had an interest in sanctioning. We will only remark, that it is difficult to persuade one's self, without faith, that the gospel of St John especially, filled with Platonic notions, could be composed by the son of Zebedee, by a poor fisherman, who, perhaps, incapable of writing, and even reading, could not be acquainted with the philosophy of Plato. (7)

Whatever opinion we may form as to this, we find the mystical and marvellous philosophy of Plato introduced very early into Christianity. This religion agreed in several respects with the tenents held by the followers of that eminent philosopher; while on the other hand his perplexed philosophy must also *have easily* amalgamated with the principles of the Christian sect. This analogy introduced into the religion of Christians the notions of *spirituality*, *trinity*, and the *Logos* or *Word*, as well as a multitude of magical and theurgical ceremonies, which, in the hands of the priests of Christianity, have become *mysteries* or *sacraments*. On

reading Porphyry, Jamblichus, and particularly Plotinus, one is surprised to hear them speaking so frequently in the same style as our theologists. These marks of resemblance drew over to the faith several Platonists, who figured among the doctors of the church. Of this number were, among others, St Clement of Alexandria, St Irenæus, St Justin Martyr, Origen, &c. In a word, Platonism may be regarded as the source of several of the principal dogmas and mysteries of the Christian religion. (8)

The austere and fanatical lives of Christians must also have favourably disposed in behalf of the sect a great number of Stoics, accustomed to make a merit of despising objects desirable to other men, depriving themselves of the comforts of life, and braving affliction and death. We find, in fact, a great number of enthusiasts, tinged with these maxims in the Christian religion. This way of thinking, or this fanaticism was very necessary to the first Christians in the midst of the crosses and persecutions, which they suffered at first on the part of the Jews, and thereafter on the part of the emperors and grandees, incited by the heathen priests. The latter, according to the custom of the priesthood in all countries, made a very cruel war on a sect, who attacked their gods, and menaced their temples with a general desertion. The universe was weary of the impostures and exactions of these priests, their costly sacrifices, and lying oracles. Their knaveries had been frequently unveiled, and the new sect tendered to mankind a worship less expensive, and which, without being addressed so much to the eyes

as the worship of idols, was better adapted than the other to set the imagination at work, and excite enthusiasm.

Moreover, Christianity was flattering and consolatory to the wretched; it placed all men on the same level, humbled the rich, and was announced as destined for the poor through preference. Among the Romans, slaves were in some measure excluded from religion; and it might have been said, that the gods did not concern themselves with the homage of these degraded beings. The poor, besides, had not wherewith to satisfy the rapacity of Pagan priests, who, like ours, did nothing without money. Thus slaves and persons in misery must have been strongly attached to a system, according to which all men are equal in the eyes of the Divinity, and the wretched have better right to the favours of a suffering and contemned God, than persons temporally happy.

The priests of paganism became, therefore, uneasy at the rapid progress of the sect. The government was alarmed at the clandestine assemblies, which the Christians held. They were believed to be the enemies of the emperors, because they continually refused to offer to the gods of the country sacrifices for their prosperity. In fine, the people, ever zealous, believed them enemies of their gods, because they would not join in their worship. They took the Christians for Atheists and impious persons, because they did not conceive, what could be the invisible objects of their adoration; and because they took offence at the mys-

teries, which they saw them celebrating in the greatest secrecy. (9) The Christians, thus loaded with the public hatred, very soon became its victims; they were persecuted: and persecution, as it always happens, rendered them more opinative. Enthusiasm more and more inflamed their souls; they made it a glory to resist the efforts of tyrants; they even went so far as to brave their punishments, and concluded with believing, that the greatest happiness was to perish under their severities. In this they flattered themselves with resembling the Son of God; and were persuaded that, by dying for his cause, they were certain of reigning with him in heaven.

In consequence of these fanatical ideas so flattering to vanity, martyrdom became an object of ambition to many Christians. Independent of the heavenly rewards, which they believed assured to those who suffered with constancy, and perished for religion; they saw them esteemed, revered, and carefully attended to during their lives, while honours almost divine were decreed them after death. On the contrary, those of the Christian community, who had the weakness to shrink from tortures, and renounce their religion, were scoffed at, despised, and regarded as infamous. So many motives combined, contributed to warm the imaginations of the faithful, already sufficiently agitated by notions of the approaching end of the world, the coming of Jesus, and his happy reign: and in short impressed with the fanatical notions, which glut the writings of the Christians. They submitted cheerfully to punishments, and gloried in their chains: they courted

martyrdom as a favour, and often thro' a blind zeal provoked the rage of their persecutors. The magistrates, by their proscriptions and tortures, caused the enthusiasm of the Christians kindle more and more. Their courage was besides supported by the heads of their sect, who constantly displayed the heavens opening to the heroes, who consented to suffer and perish for their cause, which they took care to make the poor fanatics regard as the cause of God himself. A martyr, at all times, is merely the victim of the enthusiastic or knavish priest, who has been able to seduce him. (10)

Men are always disgusted with those, who use violence; they conjecture that they are wrong, and that those, against whom they commit violence, have reason on their side. Persecution will ever make partisans to the cause persecuted: and those, to which we allude, did but the more confirm Christians in their religion. The spectators of their sufferings were interested for them. They were curious to know the principles of a sect, which drew on itself such cruel treatment, and infused into its adherents a courage believed to be supernatural. They imagined, that such a religion could be the work of a God only; its partisans appeared extraordinary men, and their enthusiasm became contagious. Violence served only to spread it the more, and according to the language of a Christian doctor, "the blood of the martyrs became the seed of the church."

They would fain make the propagation of Christianity pass for an evident miracle of divine omni-

tence, while it was owing solely to natural causes, inherent in the human mind, whose property it is to adhere strenuously to its way of thinking, harden itself against violence, applaud itself for its pertinacity, admire courage in others, feel an interest for those who display it, and suffer itself to be gained by their enthusiasm. A little reflection will suffice to perceive, that the obstinacy of the martyrs, far from being a sign of the divine protection, or of the goodness of their cause, can be regarded only as the effect of blindness occasioned by the reiterated lessons of their fanatical or deceitful priests. (11) What conduct more extravagant, than that of a sovereign, who, able at will and without effusion of blood to extend his power, should prefer to do it by the massacre of the most faithful of his subjects? Is it not annihilating the divine wisdom and goodness to assert, that a God, to whom every thing is possible, among so many ways which he could have chosen to establish his religion, wished to take only that of making its dearest friends fall a sacrifice to the fury of its cruelest enemies? Such are the notions, which Christianity presents: and it is easy to perceive, that they are the necessary consequences of a fundamental absurdity, on which that religion is established. It maintains, that a just God did not wish to chuse any other way to redeem guilty men, than that of making his dear innocent son be put to death. According to such principles, it can excite no surprise that so unreasonable a God should wish to convert the heathens his enemies, by the murder of Christians his children. Altho' these absurdities are believed, such however as do not possess the holy

blindness of faith, cannot comprehend, why the Son of God himself, having already shed his blood for the redemption of men, was not a sufficient sacrifice; — and why, to effect the conversion of the world, there was still a necessity for the blood of an immense number of martyrs, whose merits must have been undoubtedly much less than those of Jesus. It is true, that to resolve these difficulties, theologians refer us to the eternal decrees, the wisdom of which we are not permitted to criticise. This is sending us far back indeed; and yet notwithstanding the solidity of the answer, the incredulous persist in saying, that their limited understandings can find neither justice, nor wisdom, nor goodness, in eternal decrees, which could chuse in such a way to effect the salvation of the human race.

Persecutions were not the only means, which served to propagate the religion of Christians. The preachers, zealous for the salvation of souls, or rather desirous to extend their own power over the minds of men, and strengthen their party, inherited from the Jews the passion of making proselytes. (12) This passion suited presumptuous fanatics, who were persuaded, that they alone possessed exclusively the divine favour: it was unknown to heathens accustomed to suffer every one to adore peaceably his gods, providing that his worship did not disturb the public tranquillity.

Prompted by zeal, the Christian missionaries, notwithstanding persecutions and dangers, spread them-

selves with an ardour unparalleled, wherever they could penetrate, in order to convert idolators, and bring back strayed sheep to the fold of Jesus. This activity naturally believed to be recompensed with very great success. Men, whom their idolatrous priests neglected, were flattered with seeing themselves courted, and becoming the object of the disinterested cares of personages, who, through pure tenderness for them, came from afar, and through the greatest perils, to bring them consolation. In consequence of these dispositions, they listened favourably to them; they shewed kindness to men so obliging, and were enchanted with their doctrine and relations. Many adopted their lessons, placed themselves under their guidance, and found that their God and dogmas were superior to those which had preceded them.

Thus by degrees and without miracle, Christianity planted colonies, more or less considerable, in every part of the Roman empire. They were directed, and governed by *inspectors*, *overseers*, or *bishops*, who, in spite of the dangers with which they were menaced, laboured obstinately, and without intermission, in augmenting the number of their disciples, that is, of slaves devoted to their holy wills. Empire over opinions was always the most unbounded. As nothing has greater power over the minds of the vulgar than religion, Christians displayed every where an unlimited submission to their spiritual sovereign, on whose laws, they persuaded themselves, that their eternal happiness depended. Thus our missionaries, converted into bishops, exercised, with consent of their disciples, a

spiritual magistracy and sacred jurisdiction, which in the end placed them not only above other priests, but also made them be respected by, and necessary to, the temporal power. Princes have always employed religion and its ministers with success in crushing the people, and keeping them under the yoke. Impostures and delusions are of no use to sovereigns who govern, but they are very useful to those who *tyrannize*. (13)

CHAPTER EIGHTEENTH.

ACCOUNT OF CHRISTIANITY FROM CONSTANTINE TO THE
PRESENT TIME.

AT the end of three centuries, we find Christianity, advanced by all these means, become a formidable party in the Roman empire. The sovereign power acknowledged the impossibility of stifling it; and Christians, scattered in great numbers through all the provinces, formed an imposing combination. Ambitious chiefs wrested incessantly from one another the right of reigning over the wrecks of an enslaved republic: each sought to encrease his own strength, and acquire an advantage over his rivals. It was in these circumstances, that Constantine to strengthen himself first against Maxentius, and thereafter against Licinius, thought it his interest, by a stroke of policy, to draw over all the Christians to his party. For this purpose, he openly favoured them, and thereby reinforced his army with all the soldiers of that numerous sect. In gratitude for the advantages they procured him, he concluded with embracing himself their religion, now become so powerful. He honoured, distinguished, and enriched the Christian bishops, well assured of attaching them to himself by his liberality to their pastors, and the favour he shewed them. Aid-

ed by their succours, he flattered himself with the disposal of the flock. (1)

By this political revolution so favourable to the clergy, the bashful chiefs of the Christians, who hitherto had reigned only in secret and without eclat, sprung out of the dust, and became men of importance. Seconded by a very despotical emperor, whose interests were linked with theirs, they very soon employed their credit to avenge their injuries, and return to their enemies with usury the evils which they had received. The unexpected change in the fortune of the Christians made them soon forget the mild and tolerating maxims of their legislator. They conceived, that these maxims, made for wretches destitute of power, could no longer suit men supported by sovereigns. They attacked the temples and gods of paganism; their worshippers were excluded from places of trust; the master lavished his favours on those only who consented to think like him, and justify his change by imitating it. Thus, without any miracle, the court became Christian, or at least feigned to be so, and the descendants of hypocritical courtiers were Christians in reality. (2)

Even before the time of Constantine, Christianity had been rent by disputes, heresies, schisms, and animosities between the Christian chiefs. (3) The adherents of the different doctors had reviled, anathematized, and maltreated each other *incog.* — that is, without their quarrels making a noise in the world. The subtilties of Grecian metaphysics, introduced in-

to the Christian religion, had hatched an infinity of disputes, which had not hitherto been attended with any remarkable consequences. All these quarrels burst forth in the reign of Constantine. The bishops and champions of different parties caballed to draw over the emperor to their side, and thus aid them in crushing their adversaries. At the same time a very considerable party of Christians, under the banner of the priest *Arius*, denied the divinity of Jesus. Too little versed in the principles of the religion that party had embraced, but wishing to decide the question, the emperor referred it to the judgment of the bishops. He convened them in the city of Nice, and the plurality of suffrages regulated definitively the symbol of faith. Jesus became a God *consubstantial* with his Father; the Holy Ghost was likewise a God *proceeding* from the two others; finally, these three Gods combined made only one God.

Tumultuous clamours made this unintelligible decision pass, and converted it into a sacred dogma, notwithstanding the reclamations of opponents, whom they silenced by treating them as blasphemers and heretics. The priests, who had the strongest lungs, declared themselves *orthodox*. The emperor, little acquainted with the ground of the quarrel, ranged himself for the time on their side, and quitted it afterwards, according as he thought proper to lend an ear sometimes to the bishops of one party, and sometimes to those of another. In fact, the history of the church informs us, that Constantine, whom we see here adhering to the decision of the council of Nice, made the

orthodox and the heretics alternatively experience his severities.

Nevertheless, after many years, and even ages of disputes, the bishops of Christendom have agreed in regarding Jesus as a true God. They felt in the end, that it was important for them to have a God for their founder, a tenet which could not fail to render their own authority more respected. They maintained, that this authority was derived from the apostles, who held theirs directly from Christ, that is, from God himself. It would now-a-days be criminal to doubt the truth of this opinion, although many Christians are not yet convinced of it, and venture to appeal to the decision of the universal church. (4)

The bishops assembled at Nice, decided also, as we have elsewhere related, on the authenticity of the gospels and books ordained to serve for a rule to Christians. It is then to these doctors, as has been already remarked, that Christians owe their faith, which however was frequently shaken afterwards by disputes, heresies, and wars, and even by assemblies of bishops, who often annulled what other assemblies of bishops had decreed in the most solemn manner. In a word, to reckon from Constantine to our time, the interest of the heads of the church dictated every decree, and formed the rule, by which dogmas were established, often wholly unknown to the founders of their religion. The universe became the arena of the passions, disputes, intrigues, and cruelties of these holy gladiators, who treated each other with the utmost barbari-

ty. Temporal sovereigns, united in interest with spiritual chiefs, or blinded by them, thought themselves at all times obliged to partake of their fury. Princes seemed to hold the sword for the sole purpose of cutting the throats of victims pointed out by the priests, who influenced their minds. These blinded princes believed, they served God, or laboured for the welfare of their kingdoms, by espousing all the passions of the priests, become the most arrogant, the most vindictive, the most covetous and the most flagitious of men.

We will not enter into a detail of all the quarrels, which the Christian religion has produced. We will merely observe, that they were continual, and have been frequently attended with consequences so deplorable, that nations had reason, more than a hundred times every century, to regret the peaceful paganism, and tolerating idolatry of their ancestors. The gospel, or *the glad tidings*, constantly gave the signal for the commission of crimes. The cross was the banner, under which madmen assembled to glut the earth with blood. The will of Heaven was understood by nobody; and they disputed without end on the manner of explaining oracles, which the Deity had himself come to reveal to mortals. It was always indispensable to take a side in the most unintelligible quarrels: neutrality was regarded as impiety. The party for which the prince declared, was always *orthodox*, and on that account believed, it had a right to exterminate all others; - the orthodox in the church were

those who had the power to exile, imprison, and destroy their adversaries.

The bishops, whom the puissance of an emperor had raised from the dust, soon became rebellious subjects ; and under pretence of maintaining their spiritual power, laboured to be independent of the sovereign, and even the laws of society. They pretended that princes themselves, being subjects of Christ, ought to be subjected to the jurisdiction of his representatives on earth. Thus, the pretended successors of some fishermen of Judea, to whom Constantine had stretched forth his hand, arrogated to themselves the right of reigning over kings ; and thus, the kingdom of heaven served to conquer the kingdoms of the earth.

Hitherto, as has been seen, the Christian sect, spread throughout the empire, had been governed by bishops or chiefs independent of each other, and perfectly equal as to jurisdiction. This made the church an aristocratical republic ; but its government soon became monarchical, and even despotical. The respect which was always entertained for Rome, the capital of the world, seemed to give a kind of superiority to the bishop or spiritual head of the Christians established there. (5) His brethren, therefore, frequently showed a deference to him, and occasionally consulted him. Nothing more was wanting to the ambition of the bishops of Rome, or to advance the right they arrogated of judging their brethren, and incite them to declare themselves the monarchs of the Christian church. A very apocryphal tradition had made St Peter travel

to Rome, and had also made this chief of the apostles establish his see in that city. The Roman bishop therefore pretended to have succeeded to the rights of Simon Peter, to whom Jesus in the gospel had entrusted more particularly the care of feeding his sheep. He accordingly assumed the pompous titles of successor of St Peter, universal bishop, and vicar of Jesus Christ. (6) 'Tis true, these titles were often contested with him by the oriental bishops, too proud to bow willingly under the yoke of their brother; but by degrees, thro' dint of artifices, intrigues, and frequently violences, those who enjoyed the see of Rome, ever prosecuting their project with ardour, succeeded at last in getting themselves acknowledged in the west as the heads of the Christian church.

Pliant and submissive at first to sovereigns, whose power they dreaded, they soon mounted on their shoulders, and trampled them under their feet, when they saw themselves certain of their power over the minds of devotees rendered frantic by superstition. They indeed they threw off the mask, gave to nations the signal of revolt, incited Christians to their mutual destruction, and precipitated kings from their thrones. To support their pride, they shed oceans of blood; they made weak princes the vile sport of their passions;—they made them sometimes their victims and sometimes their executioners. Sovereigns, become their vassals, executed with fear and trembling the decrees Heaven had pronounced against the enemies of the holy see, which had created itself the arbiter of faith. In short, these inhuman pontiffs immolated to their

God a hundred times more human victims, than paganism had sacrificed to all its divinities.

After having succeeded in subduing the bishops, the head of the church, with a view to establish and preserve his empire over the people, inundated the states of the princes attached to the sect, with a multitude of subaltern priests and monks, who acted as his spies, his emissaries, and the organs which he employed in making known his will at a distance, and serving his ambition.

Thus the nations were deluged with men useless or dangerous. Some, under pretext of attaining Christian perfection, astonished the vulgar with a kind of frantic life, denied themselves the common pleasures of existence, renounced the world, and languished in the recesses of a cloister, awaiting the death which their disagreeable life must have rendered desirable. They imagined to please God by occupying themselves solely with prayers, sterile and extravagant meditations, and rendering themselves the victims of a destructive fanaticism. These fools, whom Christianity esteems, may be considered as the victims and martyrs of the higher clergy, who take care not to imitate them. (7)

Few people, however, felt themselves inclined to aspire to this sublime perfection. Most of the monks, more indulgent to themselves, were content with renouncing the world, vegetating in solitude, languishing in an abundant sloth, and living in absolute idleness, at the expence of nations who toil. If some among

them were devoted to study, they employed themselves only with the vain subtilties of an unintelligible theology, calculated to incite disturbances in society, and foment discord. Others more active spread themselves over the globe; and under pretext of preaching the gospel, preached up themselves, the interests of the clergy, and especially the submission due to the Roman pontiff, who was always their true sovereign. In fact, these emissaries never had any other country than the church, any other master than its head, or any other interest than that of disturbing the state in order to advance *the divine rights* of the clergy. Faithful in following the example of Jesus, they brought *the sword*, sowed discord, and kindled wars, seditions, persecutions, and crusades. They sounded the tocsin of revolt against princes disagreeable or rebellious to the haughty tyrant of the church; they frequently employed the sacrificing knife of fanaticism, and plunged it in the hearts of kings; in a word, to make the *cause of God* prosper, they justified the most horrible crimes, and threw the whole earth into combustion.

Such were, especially in latter times, the maxims and conduct of an order of monks, who, pretending to walk in the footsteps of Jesus, assumed the name of his *Society*.* Solely and blindly devoted to the interests of the Roman pontiff, they seemed to have come into the world for the sole purpose of bringing the universe under his chains. They corrupted the youth, the education of whom they wanted exclusively to engross; they strove to restore barbarism, knowing well that want of knowledge is the greatest prop of superstition;

they cried up ignorance and blind submission; they depraved the manners, and in their stead substituted vain usages and superstitions, compatible with every vice, and calculated to suppress the remorse which crime might produce. They preached up slavery and unbounded submission to princes, who themselves were their slaves, and who consented to become the instruments of their vengeance. They preached rebellion and regicide against the princes who refused to bend under the odious yoke of the successor of St Peter, whom they had the effrontery to declare *infallible*, and whose decisions they preferred far above those of the universal church. In a word, by their assistance the Pope became not only the despot, but even the true God of the Christians. (8)

There were persons, however, who ventured to protest against the violences, extortions, and usurpations of this spiritual tyrant. There were sovereigns, who, to defend their own rights, ventured to struggle with him; but in times of ignorance the contest was always unequal between the temporal and spiritual power of opinion. At last, preachers, discontented with the Roman pontiff, opened the eyes of many; they preached *reformation*, and destroyed some abuses and dogmas, which appeared to them the most disgusting. Some princes seized this opportunity to break the chains wherewith they had been so long oppressed. Without renouncing Christianity, which they always regarded as a religion wholly divine, they renounced Romish Christianity, which they considered as a superstition corrupted through the avarice, in-

terest, and passions of the clergy. Content with lopping off in this manner some branches of a poisoned tree, (which its bitter fruits should have discovered,) our *reformers* did not perceive, that even the principles of a religion, founded on fanaticism and imposture, must of necessity always hatch fanatics and knaves. They did not observe, that an exclusive religion, which pretends to enjoy alone the approbation of the Most High, must be from its essence arrogant and proud, and become at last tyrannical, intolerant, and sanguinary. They did not perceive, that the mania of proselytism, the pretended zeal for the salvation of souls, and passion of the priests for dominion over consciences, behoved, sooner or later, to create devastation. Christianity *reformed*, pretending to resemble the pure Christianity of the first days of the church, produced fiery preachers, persons illuminated, and public incendiaries, who, under pretence of *establishing the kingdom of Christ*, excited troubles, massacres, revolts, and endless disorders. Christian princes of every sect thought themselves obliged to support the decisions of their doctors. They regarded as infallible, opinions which they themselves had adopted; they enforced them by fire and sword; in a word, these princes were every where in confederacy with their priests to make war on all who did not think like them. (9)

We see, especially, the intolerant and persecuting spirit reigning in countries which continue subject to the Roman pontiff. It was there, that priests, nurtured in the maxims of a spiritual despotism, dared

with most insolence to tyrannize over minds. They had the effrontery to maintain, that the prince could not, without impiety, dispense with entering into their quarrels, sharing their frenzy, and shedding the blood of their enemies. Contrary to the express orders of Christ, the emissaries of the vicar of Jesus preached openly in his name persecution, revenge, hatred, and massacre. (10) Their clamours imposed on sovereigns; and the least credulous trembled at sight of their power, which they dared not curb. A superstitious and cowardly policy made them believe, that it was the interest of the throne to unite itself for ever with these inhuman and boisterous madmen. Thus princes, submissive to the clergy, and making common cause with them, became the ministers of their vengeance and the executors of their will. These blind princes were obliged to support a power the rival of their own, but did not perceive, that they injured their own authority by delivering up their subjects to the tyranny and extortions of a swarm of men, whose interest it was to plunge them into ignorance, incite their fanaticism, make themselves masters of their minds, domineer over their consciences, and in a word, make them fit instruments to serve their pride, avarice, revenge, and obstinacy. By this worthless policy, in the states most submissive to the spiritual dominion of the Roman pontiff, the liberty of thinking was proscribed with fury, activity was repressed, science was punished, and industry crushed by the rapacity of the clergy while manners were neglected, and their place supplied by traditional observances. Nations vegetated in inactivity; men cultivated only mona-

stic virtues, grievous to themselves and useless to society. (ix) They had no other impulse than what their fanaticism afforded, and no other science than an obscure jargon of theology. Their understandings had no other employment than endless disputes on mysterious subtilties, unworthy of rational beings. Those futile occupations engrossed the attention of the most profound genius, whose labours would have been useful, if they had been directed to objects really interesting.

Nations were impoverished to foster in abundance, luxury, and often drunkenness, legions of monks, priests, and pontiffs, from whom they derived no real benefits. Under pretext of bestowing stipends on the intercessors with God, they endowed richly a multitude of drones, whose prayers and reveries procured only misery and dissensions. Education, entrusted throughout Christendom to base or ignorant priests, was calculated to form superstitious persons only, destitute of the qualities necessary to make useful citizens. The instruction they gave Christians, was confined to inculcating dogmas and mysteries, which the latter never could comprehend. They incessantly preached up evangelical morality; but that sublime morality, which all the world esteems, and which so few practise, because it is incompatible with the nature and wants of most men, did not restrain the passions, or ever check their irregularity of manners. When that Stoical morality was practised, it was only by some imbecile fanatics or fiery enthusiasts, whom the ardour of their zeal rendered dangerous to society. The saints of

Christianity were either the most useless or most flagitious of men,

Princes, the great, the rich, and even the heads of the church, thought themselves excused from the rigorous and literal practice of precepts and counsels, which a God himself had come on purpose to communicate. They left Christian perfection to some miserable monks, for whom alone it seemed originally destined. Complaisant guides smoothed for others the roads to paradise, and, without bridling the passions, persuaded their votaries, that it was sufficient to come at stated times *to confess* their faults to them, humble themselves at their feet, undergo the penances and ceremonies, which they should impose, and especially make donations to the church, in order to obtain from God remission of the outrages they committed on his creatures. By these means, in the most Christian countries, people and princes openly united devotion with the most hideous depravity of manners, and often with the blackest crimes. There were devout tyrants and adulterers, oppressors and iniquitous ministers, courtiers without morals, and public depredators, all very devout. There were knaves of every kind displaying the greatest zeal for a religion, the ministers of which imposed easy expiations even on those, who violated its most express precepts. (12)

Thus by the cares of the spiritual guides of Christians, concord was banished from states, princes sunk into bondage, the people were blinded, science was stifled, nations were impoverished, true morality was

unknown, and the most devout Christians were commonly devoid of those talents and virtues, which are indispensibly necessary for the support of society.

Such are the immense advantages, which the religion of Christ has procured to the world ! Such are the effects we see resulting from the gospel, or the *glad tidings*, which the Son of God came in person to announce ! To judge of it *by its fruits*, (that is, according to the rule which the Messiah himself has given,) the incredulous find, that Christianity was allegorically represented by the *fig tree accursed*. But those, who have faith, warrant to us, that in the other world this tree will some day produce delicious fruits. We must therefore wait for them in patience, for every thing evinces, that the great benefits, promised by this religion, are but very little perceptible in the present world.

¶ There are, however, people who carry incredulity so far as to think, that, if there exists a God, really jealous of his rights, he will bestow little recompence on mortals so impious as to associate with him a man, a Jew, and a charlatan ; and to pay him honours, which are due only to the Divinity. Indeed, in supposing that God is offended by the actions of his creatures, and concerns himself with their behaviour, he must be irritated at the odious conduct of many Christians, who, under pretence of devotion and zeal, believe themselves permitted to violate the most sacred duties of nature, of which they make the Deity the author.

It is, add our unbelievers, very difficult to calculate the duration of human extravagancies; but they flatter themselves, that the reign of falsehood and error will terminate at some period, and give place to reason and truth. (13) They hope, that nations and their chiefs will some day perceive the danger resulting from prejudices: that they will blush at having prostituted their praises on objects deserving sovereign contempt; that they will regret the blood and treasures, which baneful fables and reveries have cost them; and that they will be at last ashamed of having been the dupes and victims of a mass of romances, destitute of probability, and never possessing a more solid foundation than the astonishing credulity of men, and the astonishing impudence of those who preach them. These unbelievers venture at least to glimpse at a time, when men, become more sensible of their own interest, will acknowledge the truly barbarous folly of hating and tormenting themselves, and cutting one another's throats for obscure dogmas, puerile opinions, and ceremonies unworthy of rational beings, and on which it is impossible to be ever unanimous. These infidels push their temerity so far as to maintain, that it is very possible, sovereigns and subjects may one day loathe a religion burdensome to the people, and producing real advantages only to the priests of a beggarly and crucified God. They think, that the profane laity, if undeceived, could easily bring their priests back to the frugal life of the apostles or of Christ, whom they ought to regard as a model; at least, these infidels imagine, the ministers of the God of peace would be obliged to live more peaceably, and

follow some occupation more honest than that of deceiving, or tearing to pieces, the society which fosters them.

If it is demanded of us, what can be substituted for a religion, which at all times has produced only effects pernicious to the happiness of the human race; we will bid men cultivate their reason, which, much better than absurd and deceptive systems, will advance their welfare, and make them sensible of the value of virtue. Finally, we will tell them with Tertullian—
WHY PAIN YOURSELVES IN SEEKING FOR A DIVINE LAW,
WHILST YOU HAVE THAT WHICH IS COMMON TO MANKIND
AND ENGRAVEN ON THE TABLETS OF NATURE. (14)

(14) Tertull. de corona militis.

NOTES.

PREFACE.

PAGE 3. (1)—The opinion of most theologists is, that the Holy Ghost has revealed to the sacred writers even the orthography of the words they have employed, yea, even the points and commas. But supposing the reality of this inspiration of the sacred writers, still it would not be sufficient; it would be farther necessary to guarantee that all the copyists and monks during the ages of ignorance, who have transmitted to us the revealed writings, have committed no faults in transcribing them. A point or a comma misplaced are sufficient, we know, to alter completely the sense of a passage.

P. 3. (2)—We see Jesus Christ inculcating faith in all his discourses, and especially in St Matthew, xxi. 21—22. in St Mark, xvi. 16. “He, who hath faith, shall remove mountains. He, who shall believe and be baptized, shall be saved,” &c. Several Christian sects believe, according to those passages, that faith itself without works is sufficient for salvation.

P. 4. (3)—*Concil. Trident.* Sess. iv. The Cardinal Pallavicini, in his history of the council of Trent, removes every difficulty, by saying, that "all the faith of Christians is founded only on one single article, "namely, on the infallible authority of the church."

P. 5. (4)—Proverbs of Solomon, xxv. 2. It is on this odious maxim, so dishonourable to the Divinity, that all mysteries are founded. What right had St Justin to reproach the Pagans with the impiety of one of their poets, who had said, that the gods, during the greater part of their time, "amused themselves with "deceiving men?" Is not the whole bible a continual snare laid for the human understanding? Is not the whole conduct of Christ, according to the gospel itself, a snare laid for the Jews, so that hearing, they might not understand, and seeing, they might not believe in the Messiah.

P. 8. (5)—Victor of Tunis informs us, that in the sixth century the Emperor Anastasius made the gospels be corrected, as works composed by fools or ignorant people. *Messala consule, Anastasio imperatore jubente, Evangelia, tanquam ab IDIOTIS EVANGELISTIS composita, reprehenduntur et emendantur.*

P. 9. *—Whoever has perused the ancient historians, particularly Herodotus, Plutarch, Livy, and Josephus, must feel the force of this reasoning. Ancient writers with a pious credulity, similar to that of Christians, relate prodigies pregnant with absurdities, which they themselves witnessed, or were witnessed by o-

thers. Among the prodigies that appeared at Rome, some time before the triumvirate, many statues of the gods sweat blood and water, and there was an ox which spoke.—Under the Empire of Caligula, the statue of Jupiter at Olympus burst forth into such loud fits of laughter, that those who were taking it down to carry it to Rome, abandoned their work and fled in terror. A crow prognosticated misfortune to Domitian by its *ESTAI PANTA KALOS*; and an owl paid the same compliment to Herod. *Tr.*

P. 10. (6)—See Tillimont. tome 2. p. 47, 257, 438. St Epiphan. Homil. 34. The celebrated Henry Dodwell affirms, that it was not till the reign of Trajan, or indeed of Hadrian, that is more than a century after J. C. that a collection or canon of the books was made, which compose the New Testament. These writings had, even till then, been concealed in the archives of churches, and were only in the hands of priests, who could dispose of them at their pleasure. See H. Dodwell *Dissertationes in Irenæum*, p. 66. &c. (To this may be added the profound work of M. Freret, published in 1766 under the title of *Examen des apologistes de la religion Chrétienne*.) Moreover it is evident, that amongst the first Christian doctors there was a great number of pious forgers, who, to make their cause prevail have framed and forged gospels, legends, romances, oracles of Sybils, and, in short, works, of which the imposture and folly were so striking, that the church itself has been forced to reject them. To be convinced of this we need only to cast our eyes on the work intituled *Codex Apocryphus*

Novi Testamenti, published by J. A. Fabricius, at Hamburg, 1719. The practice of making evangelical romances is not yet left off in the Romish church. A Jesuit, called father Jerome Xavier, a missionary in Persia, composed in the Persian language a ridiculous history of Jesus, his mother, and St Peter, which has been published in Persian and Latin under the title of *Historia Christi Persica*, in 4to, Lugd. Batav. 1639. Every body knows *L' Histoire du peuple de Dieu*, very lately published by the Rev. Father Berruyer. It is known, that in the thirteenth century the Cordeliers (*les freres mineurs*) composed a book under the title of *L' Evangile eternel*. In a word, in all ages Christians, whether orthodox or heretics, have been piously occupied in deceiving the simple. Some have gone so far as to palm works on Jesus, and we have a letter of his to king Abgarus. It ought to be remarked, that authors approved by the church, such as St Clemens Romanus, St Ignatius Martyr, St Justin, and St Clement of Alexandria, have quoted passages, which are not found in the four gospels admitted at present. When the Christian religion was established, and had been adopted by persons less stupid than its first adherents, the heads of the church, afraid of rendering themselves contemptible, made a selection from amongst the collections of fables, with which they were inundated; and declared *apocryphal* the works which they judged capable of discrediting the respectable authors, to whom they were ascribed. It appears, however, that these works had been previously admitted, and cited by doctors less nice than their successors. These writings, some of which still remain,

evinced both the effrontery of their framers, and the improbability of the first Christians, to whom such romances were presented.

P. 11. * The author here alludes to what logicians style, "reasoning in a circle." *Tr.*

P. 13. (7). — Ecclesiastical history proves, that Constantine afterwards persecuted St Athanasius, exiled him to Treves, and died an Arian. His son Constantius lived and died in the same sect. Still farther, Father Petau the Jesuit, as well as other learned men, have believed, that before the Council of Nice the church was Socinian or Arian. At least it is certain, that the word *consubstantial*, which was adopted and consecrated by that Council, had been proscribed and condemned by the Council of Antioch, held against the famous Paul of Samosata. But our doctors have recourse to saying, with St Augustine, that the ancient general councils themselves were corrected by posterior councils. — *Ipse plenaria consilia priora a posterioribus emendantur* : Or else they tell us, with the Cardinal de Cusa, that "the church, by changing its opinion, obliges us to believe, that God also changes his." — Thus it is that the clergy sport with Christians !

CHAPTER FIRST.

P. 21. † It is now difficult to ascertain how many rods Moses and Aaron were possessed of. A piece of Aaron's rod is preserved in the Cathedral of Milan; yet the canons of St John de Lateran at Rome pretend, that it is deposited entire with them, as also the ark of the covenant. Some pieces of this rod are likewise shown in the palace church at Hanover, among the reliques which Henry surnamed the Lion brought from the Holy Land; where also is deposited a piece of Moses' rod.—Keysser and Miffon. Another piece of Aaron's rod is preserved, with the staff of Moses, in the cathedral of Florence.—K. Moses' rod is still entire at Rome. Moses and Aaron have each a rod at Florence.—Miffon.

P. 22. (1) Josephus acquaints us with the idea people had of his nation: they said, "that the Jews were "the most stupid of barbarians, and that they had never invented any thing useful to man."—Joseph. c. Appion, lib. 2, and the book lately published under the title of *Opinions des anciens sur les Juifs*. Yet there are scholars blind enough to maintain, that the Greeks have borrowed a great number of philosophical and theological ideas from the Jews.

P. 24. (2) The author has established all these facts in a work, intituled, *L'Esprit de Judaïsme*, (the Spirit of Judaism,) which may be considered as an introduction to this. The emperor Julian in his "Dis-

"course against the Christians," preserved by St Ciry, contrasts the sad situation of the Jewish people, so favoured by Providence, with the flourishing state of other nations.

P. 35. (4) The celebrated Anthony Collins has composed in English two curious and profound works, wherein he demonstrates in the clearest manner, that none of the prophecies of the Old Testament can be literally applied to Jesus. They have since published an abridgement in French of these two works of Collins, under the title of *Examen des propheties, qui servent de fondement a la religion Chretienne*. On this subject we have also several able works composed by Jews, and among others two, whereof one has this title, *Liber Nizzachon vetus*, and the other *Munimen fidei*, which are to be found in the collection intitled, *Tela ignea Satanæ*, published by Wagenseil, in one vol. 4to, Altorf. 1681. To these we may add the work intitled, *Philippi a Limborch, de veritate religionis Christianæ amica collatio, cum erudito Judæo*, 4to. In short, we will find the natural meaning of the Jewish prophecies in a curious work of the Jew Isaac Orobio, wherein this matter is learnedly treated. This work, the manuscript of which exists, is intitled, *Israel venge, ou exposition naturelle des propheties que les Chretiens appliquent a Jesus*, (Israel vindicated, or natural exposition of the prophecies which Christians apply to Jesus.)

CHAPTER SECOND.

P. 38. (1) Some critics have drawn from this relationship of Elizabeth with the Virgin Mary a proof, that the latter was not of the race of David. Elizabeth, to espouse a priest, behoved to have been of the tribe of Levi, as the Jews could marry only in their own tribe; in which case her kinswoman Mary ought also to have been of the tribe of Levi, and not of Judah, of which tribe David was. St Augustine farther relates, that in his time several works, which he styles *Apoeryphal*, asserted, that Mary was of the tribe of Levi. See lib. 23, *contra Faustum*, c. 9,

P. 39. †—Loretta is famous for the *Casa Sancta*, or house in which the virgin Mary is said to have dwelt at Nazareth. It was transported thro' the air by angels in the month of May 1291, out of Gallilee into Dalmatia, and after several removals fixed where it at present stands. The porringer made use of by the infant Jesus is also preserved here. It is not unworthy of remark that when the eunuchs, belonging to the choir of the holy chapel of Loretto, say mass, they carry their testicles about them in a small box, concluding, says Keysser, v. iv. p. 26. by mathematical calculation, that $\frac{1}{200}$ and $\frac{1}{100}$ are always equal to an integer. In the church near the *Casa Sancta* there is a picture of a priest offering his entrails to the virgin Mary. The priest was by birth a Dalmatian; see farther particulars, K. ib. 27—28, Misson, v. i. 3. relates a similar story of eunuchs officiating at Venice. *and see next lib.*

P. 40. (2)—The quality of angel, which the Evangelist gives to Gabriel, cannot perplex us; this difficulty, so very easily removed, hangs solely on the synonymy of the words, *Angel*, *God*, and *Man*. But Jesus is sometimes called the Son of Man, and sometimes the son of God. Judges, princes, and grandees are called *gods* in several passages of scripture. Exodus xxii. last verse, Psalm xviii. 6. The patriarchs and Moses believed, that God shewed himself to them in visions; but St Paul, in his epistle to the Hebrews, chap. ii. 2. assures us, that it was only angels and not God himself, who promulgated the law, and spoke to the holy patriarchs. Thus is God already reduced to be only an angel. In the New Testament the doctors are called *angels*.—St Matthew Epistle to the Galatians, chap. iv. 14. Rev. ii, &c. Here then men are changed into angels. In short, among the Jews the names of *gods*, *angels*, and *saints* were merely titles, which were given, and taken, without attaching any consequence to them, as Christ himself remarks in St John x. 34, &c. This will suffice to explain the passage in St Luke, where it is said, “that holy thing which shall be born of thee, shall be called the Son of God;” and all the marvellous in the word *angel* will disappear. To form a clear idea of the birth of Jesus, the reader should consult the story of brother Lucius in the tales of La Fontaine. According to the Apocryphal gospel of *The nativity of Mary*, (which, by-the-bye, Father Jerome Xavier the Jesuit adopts entirely,) Mary was consecrated to the Lord, and brought up in the temple, which she did not leave till sixteen years of age. This must create

a suspicion, that her pregnancy was the effect of some intrigue of the priests, who perhaps made her believe, that it was God, who had begot a child on her.—Codex Apocryph. N. T. p. 19, &c.

Ibid. (3) Such as are curious to see the history and fables, which the Rabbies have made about Jesus, will find them in a Hebrew book, translated into Latin, under the title of *Toldes Jesbu*, inserted in a collection published under the title of *Tela ignea Satanae*, by Wagenfeil, 4to, Altorf, 1681.

P. 41. (4) Theologists have agitated the question, whether, in the conception of Christ, the Virgin Mary *emiserit semen*? According to M. de Tillemont, tome 2. p. 5. the Gnostics, heretics who lived in the time of the apostles, denied even then, that the Word was incarnate in the womb of the woman, and averred that it had taken a body *only in appearance*—a circumstance which must destroy the miracle of the *resurrection*. Basilides in like manner maintains, that Jesus *was not incarnate*—Tillemont, tome 2. p. 221. St Epiph: advers. hæret. Theodoret. hæretic. fab. lib. i. p. 195. Lactantius, in order to establish that the spirit of God could impregnate a virgin, cites the example of the Thracian mares and other females rendered prolific by the wind.—Institut. Div. lib. 4. c. 12. Yet the same Lactantius, upbraiding the pagans with the necessity their gods had of females to engender, has said, *Quid igitur opus est sexu femino; cum Deus, qui est omnipotens, sine usu et opera feminae possit filios procreare*? Lact. *ibid.* lib. i. c. 8. Nothing is more

indecent and ridiculous than the theological questions, to which the birth of J. C. has given rise. Some doctors, to preserve Mary's virginity, have maintained, that Jesus did not come into the world, like other men, *aperta vulva*, but rather *per vulvam clausam*. The celebrated John Scotus, on the contrary, regarded that opinion as very dangerous, as it would follow, that "J. C. could not be born of the Virgin, but "merely had come out of her." A monk of Cîteaux, called Ptolemy de Luques, affirmed, that Jesus was engendered near the Virgin's heart, from three drops of her blood.—Bibliothèque Angloise, tome 2, p. 354-5. The great St Thomas Aquinas has examined, whether J. C. could not have been a *hermaphrodite* ? and whether he could not have been of the *feminine gender* ? Others have agitated the question, "Whether Jesus could have been incarnate in a cow?" We may therefore see, how one absurdity may engender others, in the prolific minds of theologists.

P. 43. (5) We may also add, that St Luke asserts, this pretended taxing was made under *Quirinus* or *Cyrenius* ; but it has been demonstrated, that *Quintilius Varus* was at the time governor of the province.

Christian preachers and scribes remark with delight, that the temple of Janus was shut, and that a profound peace reigned throughout the whole world at the time of Christ's birth ; but the falsehood of this fact has been proved in a book published in 1700. See *Bernard, Nouvelles de la republique des lettres*, tome 15.

P. 46. (6) The *proto gospel*, ascribed to St James, relates some curious and ridiculous circumstances, on which none of our four canonical evangelists have wished to lean; yet they have nothing revolting to persons, who possess faith enough. This proto-gospel informs us, for example, of the ill humour of Joseph on seeing his wife pregnant, the reproaches he loaded her with, on account of her lewdness, unworthy, according to it, of a virgin reared under the eyes of priests. Mary excuses herself with tears; she protests her innocence, and "swears in the name of the "living God, that she is ignorant from whence the "child has come to her." It appears, that in her distress she had forgot the adventure of Gabriel; that angel came the night following to encourage by a dream poor Joseph, who, on his part, was on the point of having an affair with the priests, who accused him of having palmed this child, to the prejudice of Mary's vow of virginity. On this the priests made the two spouses drink *of the waters of jealousy*, that is, of a potion, which, by a miracle, did them no injury; the high priest, therefore, declared them most innocent.

It is likewise related in the same gospel, that after Mary had been delivered, Salome refusing to credit the midwife, who assured her, that the delivered was still a virgin, laid her hand on Mary in order to satisfy herself of the fact. Immediately this rash hand felt itself on fire; but she was cured on taking the little Jesus in her arms. See Codex Apocr. N. T. tome i. p. 95—113.

CHAPTER THIRD.

P. 48. † — We are told, that some beams of this star were formerly preserved at Rome, with the horns of Moses. These rays have been long since eclipsed or evaporated, as well as the sound of the Jerusalem bells. Moses's horns were transported to Genoa,—where, if we may believe the common report, they are still safely preserved.—Misson, vol. 2d. page 45.—*Tr.*

P. 50. † — The relics of these Magi, or three pretended kings, are preserved at Cologne, having been conveyed thither from Milan. Fame attributes many miracles to them: They sell, for a penny a dozen little billets, which have touched them, and communicate their virtues.—*Tr.*

P. 52. † — In our version, the word *Ramah* appears: Supposing it to be correctly translated, our author must have committed a mistake.—*Tr.*

Ibid. (3)—The gospel of *The Infancy of Jesus* informs us, that his foreskin was put in a vase of alabaster, and preserved in balm. Some authors assert, that this divine prepuce may be seen still at Rome in the church of St John de Lateran.—Codex Apocryph: N. T. tome 1, p. 171. The city of Antwerp, however, disputes with Rome the honour of possessing this jewel.

In the church of St James Scoffiavalli, at Rome, they show the stone on which Christ was circumcised, with the impression made by one of his heels upon the marble; and also another marble table, on which Abraham designed to have sacrificed his son. These relics were the present of the empress Helena.—*Tr.*

P. 53. (5)—St Luke, *ib.* 39. The ancient fabricators of gospels, who framed that of *The infancy of Jesus*, and ascribed it to the apostle St Thomas, have preserved numberless miracles and other pastimes of Christ when young. He is frequently represented there as a very wicked boy; when displeased with his companions he killed them. This gospel of *The infancy* has been rejected, like many others, altho' it contains nothing, which can appear incredible to folks, whose faith is so robust as to admit the four *canonical* gospels. Codex Apocryph. N. T. tome 1. p. 159, &c.

P. 55. (6)—It is of much importance to remark, that the first Christians were styled Nazarenes. We find them also designed under the name of Ebionites, derived from a Hebrew word, which signifies a mendicant, a wretch and a pauper. Every body knows, that in the 13th century St Francis and St Dominic, who proposed to revive primitive Christianity, founded orders of mendicant monks, destined to live solely on alms, to be true Nazarenes, and to levy contributions on the community, which these vagabonds have never ceased to distress. Salmeson, in order to reanimate the sanctity of these mendicant monks, has maintained, that Jesus Christ himself was a beggar.

Be that as it may, it is not unseasonable to make here some remarks on the Nazarenes, which will throw great light on the history of Christianity. It is well known, that the name of Nazarenes was given to the apostles and Jews, who were first converted. The Jews regarded them as heretics, (minian) and excommunicated persons, and, according to St Jerome, anathematized them in all their synagogues under the name of Nazarenes. *St Hieronym. Epist. ad ib. in Isaiam. v. 18.* The Jews even at present give the name of Nazarenes (Nozerim) to the Christians, whom the Arabs and Persians call *Nazari*. The first Jews, converted by Jesus and his apostles, were only some reformed Jews: they preserved circumcision and other usages appointed by the law of Moses. *Nazaræi*, says St Jerome, *ita Christum recipiunt, ut observationes legis veteris non amittant, Ad. Jesh. 8.* They followed herein the example of Jesus, who (himself being circumcised, and Jew during his whole life) had often taught, that it was necessary to respect and observe the law. Yet in process of time the Nazarénes, or Ebionites, were anathematized by the other Christians, for having united the ceremonies of the law with the gospel of Christ. St Jerome, speaking of them and the disciples of Corinthus, says, *Qui (Ebioni et Cerinthieni) credentes in Christo, propter hoc solum a patribus anathematizati sunt, quod legis ceremonias Christi evangelio miscuerunt. Sic nova confessi sunt, ut vetera non amitterent. St Hieron. in Epistol ad Augustin.* It seems, that in acting thus, the Ebionites, or Nazarenes, conformed themselves to the intentions of Jesus and his apostles. It is therefore surprising to see

them treated afterwards as heretics. But we will see (in chap. 17.) the true cause of this change: it was evidently owing to St Paul, whose party prevailed over that of St Peter, the other apostles and the Nazarenes or Judaizing Christians. Thus St Paul corrected, and reformed the system of Jesus Christ, who had preached only a *Judaism reformed*. That apostle of the Gentiles succeeded in making his master, and his old comrades be regarded as *heretics*, or bad Christians. Thus it is, that theologists frequently take the liberty of rectifying the religion of the Saviour, they adore ! Moreover, the Nazarenes had a gospel in Hebrew very different from the one we possess, and which was attributed to St Barnabas. See Toland in an English work published under the title of NAZARENES in octavo, London, 1718. According to that Gospel, the Nazarenes did not believe in the divinity of Jesus Christ.—See Note 3d. Chapter 17. of this work.

P. 55, (7) — The Gospel of the Infancy of J. C. which we have already mentioned, makes the holy family travel into Egypt, and makes J. go from city to city, working miracles, sufficient to procure them a comfortable subsistence. The water, Mary used in washing her child, cured lepers, and persons possessed with devils; the presence of Christ made the idols fall down, untied their codpieces, &c.—Codex Apoc. tome 1. p. 182.

P. 57. † — Notwithstanding the scepticism of our author on this historical fact, any of our readers who

choose to visit the *sanctum sanctorum* of the Lateran palace at Rome, may fully inform themselves of its truth, as several of the bones of these holy innocents are there preserved under the high altar. *Keyser*:

P. 59. (8) St Epiphanius, Lib. i. 10. of *heresies*, assures us, that Joseph was very old at the time of his marriage with the virgin; the above author adds, that he was a widower, and father of six children by his first wife. According to the *proto-gospel* ascribed to St James the young, the good man had much difficulty in prevailing on himself to espouse Mary, whose age intimidated him; but the high priest convinced him, finding perhaps that Joseph was the man most conformable to his views. Codex. Apocryph. N. T. tome I. p. 88, &c. This seems to insinuate a sacerdotal intrigue, as we have already remarked.

P. 62. † St Matthew says, *But when Herod was dead*, &c. chap. ii. ver. 19. Our author therefore must be mistaken. *Tr.*

P. 62. (10) Jesus perhaps passed a considerable part of his life among the contemplative *Essenians* or *Therapeutes*, who were a kind of very enthusiastic Jewish monks, living in the vicinity of Alexandria in Egypt, where it appears Christ drew up his severe and truly monastic doctrine. See c. xvii.³ note 1, of this work.

Ibid. (12) St Justin Martyr contra Tryphon. The gospel of *The Infancy* informs us, that Jesus when

young, amused himself with forming small birds of clay, which were afterwards animated by him, and flew away into the air. The same book says, that he knew more than his schoolmaster, whom he killed for having struck him, because J. refused to read the letters of the Alphabet. We find also, that Jesus assisted Joseph in his labours, and lengthened, by miracle, the pieces of wood, when cut too short or too narrow. All these extravagancies are not more difficult to believe than many other wonders related in the acknowledged gospels. Codex. Apocryph. N. T. tome I. p. 198, &c. and III. p. 424—441.

CHAPTER FOURTH.

P. 67. (2) St Matthew, c. iii. v. 14. The Jews were in the use of baptizing all the proselytes they made. Baptism was, according to them, a *regeneration*, calculated to render the baptised quite a new man, in so far as to be then entitled to marry his own mother. But John and Jesus wished to baptise, or regenerate, the Jews themselves, pretending that regeneration was as necessary for them as for the proselytes. See Bernard in the *Nouvelles de la Republ. des Letters*, tome. 31. p. 566.

P. 68. (4) It was an opinion received by several Jews, that Elias must come before the Messiah. A great number of Christians believe also in our days, that the coming of Elias ought to precede the advent

of Jesus Christ in order to judge the world. See the sentiments of the fathers on the return of Elias. It is the opinion of our Jansenists at this day, who, like the first Christians, have their heads filled with fanatical and woeful ideas of the near end of the world.

P. 70. † A piece of St Andrew's arm is in the cathedral of Florence.—Keysser, v. 2. p. 199.

Ibid. † In the cathedral of Florence is preserved a thumb of John-Baptist, with some of his ashes; and in the church of St John the Baptist, in the same city, the people worship with the highest veneration the finger, with which he is said to have pointed to Jesus. In the cathedral of Sienna the right arm of John is preserved entire. The church of St Sylvester at Rome boasts of having his head; but though five popes have declared in favour of this church and convent, yet the canons of Amiens maintain, that they alone are in possession of the Baptist's real head, and Du Cange has published a long and learned dissertation in support of their claim.—Keysser. His blood is still preserved at Naples in the church of St Maria Donna. Romita. The whole of his ashes however are claimed by the cathedral of Genoa, and are said to have been brought from Smyrna.—Misson.

CHAPTER SIXTH.

P. 97. † The doctrine of two principles is borrowed from Zoroaster, the celebrated legislator of the Persians, who flourished under Darius Hystaspes. Oromasdes or Oromazus, the ancient of days, and Arimanes, the genius of darkness, are the original divinities of manichæism. Oromazes is the name, which the Magi and Chaldeans give to the Supreme Being, and which in the Chaldaic language signifies *burning light*. They represent God as surrounded by fire, and declare that *his body is like unto light* and *his soul unto truth*. This God was the good principle, but there was another bad principle which they called Arimanes, or Arimanus, that is, in Chaldaic, *my enemy, or cunning and deceitful*. It is opposed to Oromazes, who was to destroy it however at last. This is the Osiris and Typhon of the Egyptians; this the Pandora of the Greeks; this the Jehovah and Satan of Jews and Christians; and such are the vain efforts of all the sages to explain the original of good and evil.—Tr.

CHAPTER SEVENTH.

P. 103 (1) M. Fleury, in the *Mœurs des Chrétiens*, p. 14. ed. 1601, speaking of Jesus Christ, employs these remarkable words, "He was very grave. He was seen to weep on two occasions, but it is not related, that he has laughed: not but he has smiled

"sweetly, as St Chrysostom remarks." As men are accustomed to regard God as a very malignant being, and not understanding raillery, they require gravity in all who come on his service. The more gloomy a religion is, the more it pleases men, who love to indulge fear. Reformers to succeed must always display an austere exterior. Devotees prefer a harsh and morose confessor to an easy one; a preacher who excites terror is always certain of success. The Jansenists are reformers, who strive to bring back Christians to their primitive gloom, and who would succeed in reviving the fanaticism of the apostolic times, if the world was not altered.

P. 109. (2)—Compare as to this history, St Matthew ix. St Mark v. and St Luke v.

P. 111. (3)—It appears, notwithstanding all his gravity, that the ladies were the foibles of Jesus; melancholy persons are not the men least susceptible of this weakness. He was very ardently loved by Mary Magdalene, who appears to have been the model of condescending devotees, or debauched females, whose temperament usually leads them to give themselves up to religion with as much passion after their conversion, as they did before to the world and their lovers. The Albigenes maintained, that Magdalene had a criminal complaisance for the Saviour.—*Vide La Christiade*, tome 1. The Faculty of Theology at Paris gravely decided in 1620, that Mary Magdalene, Mary the sister of Lazarus, and Mary the courtesan were one and the same lady; but the Sorbonne has since then chang-

ed its opinion, and pretends, that these are three very different Mariæ.—See Bernard, *Nouvelles de la Repub. des Lettres*, tome 21. p. 200. ib. tome 32. p. 140.

P. 112. (4)—St Matthew ix. St Mark ii. St Luke v. and especially the epistles ascribed to St Barnabas, in which that apostle says expressly, that “the apostles, whom the Lord chose, were very wicked men, “and above all sinners iniquitous.”

P. 117. (5)—Dom. La Tasse, a celebrated Benedictine of the Molineist party has very lately written some letters against the pretended miracles of the Deacon Paris, which miracles he ascribes to the operation of the devil. His zeal has been rewarded with a bishoprick: his partizans have not perceived, that the arguments, which this monk employed in combating the miracles of a Jansemit, destroyed, by a rebound, the miracles of Jesus Christ, who are less amply attested than those of Paris, which last so many persons still alive believe, or pretend to have been witnesses of. A Swiss and Protestant clergyman has also lately attacked the miracles of Pythagoras, Appollonius Thyaneus, and the seraphic St Francis, in a manner which equally destroys all those Christians have inserted in the gospel. See the book intitled, *De miraculis quæ Pythagoræ, &c. tribuuntur libellus, auctore Phileleuthero Helvetio*, Duaci, 1734, in 8vo. (The famous Woolston has composed in English a work recently translated into French, under the name of *Discourses on the miracles of Jesus Christ*, 2 vols, 1769, in which

the author proves, that even according to the fathers of the church, all the miracles of Christ are only allegories.) *Addition de l' Editeur.*

Mr Woolston's discourses were so eminent for the *lucidus ordo* in argumentation, incontrovertible reasoning, and inflexible justice, that the secular arm was employed to crush him : thus a man of the most blameless manners, whose literary labours in theology divines and bishops strove in vain to refute, became an illustrious example of the persecuting spirit of churchmen, whose intolerant and sanguinary dispositions, while seconded by the temporal power, (thus reciprocally aiding each other) no pleas of humanity or sacred justice can controul. *Tr.*

CHAPTER EIGHTH.

P. 125. (4) —In our time we have seen the populace running to the miracles of M. Paris, and believing them ; we have even seen persons of distinguished rank, and women of quality attest them openly, persuaded of their reality ; but these miracles have never been able to conquer the incredulity of the Molinist clergy, of the government and the police ; and the latter, as every body knows, have succeeded in putting an end to the miracles of the Most High. We know the epigram posted upon the gate of the churchyard of St Medard :

D d 2

*De par le roi, defense a Dieu
De faire miracle en ce lieu.*

The king commands, that God shall not
Work more miracles on this spot.

God was obedient; he no longer performed miracles for the Jansenists, but with shut doors, and in the garrets of the street Moufetard.

CHAPTER NINTH.

P. 150. (1)—See in chap. xii. a note taken from the *Talmud*, proving that it was permitted to anoint the sick with oil on the Sabbath day for their relief. Farther, the Essenians observed the Sabbath with so much rigour, that they did not allow themselves to satisfy on that day the most pressing wants of life. This perhaps gave occasion to the reproaches, with which the Jews loaded Jesus on that head, who had reformed this ridiculous custom by his own authority.

CHAPTER TENTH.

P. 139. (1)—It appears that Jesus knew not enough of theology to reconcile *free will* with divine decrees. This has not been since too well supplied by teaching the odious dogmas of *predestination* and *effectual call-*

ing, which make God the most fanatical and cruel of tyrants, by supposing that he punishes to all eternity those to whom he refuses the means or the will of saving themselves. In return, these dogmas have furnished an ample field for disputation.

P. 140. (2)—One is quite surprised at finding, that Moses and the ancient Hebrew writers have nowhere made mention of the dogma of a future life, which forms now-a-days one of the most important articles of the Christian religion. Solomon speaks of the death of men by comparing it with that of brutes. See *Ecclesiast.* Some of the prophets, it is true, have spoken of a place called *Cheol*, which has been translated *Hell*; (*Enfer*) yet it is evident, that this word implies merely *sepulchre*, or *tomb*. They have in like manner translated the Hebrew word *Topheth* by *Hell*; but on examining the term closely we find, that it designates a place of punishment near Jerusalem, where malefactors were punished, and their carcases burned. It was only after the Babylonish captivity, that the Jews knew the dogma of another life and the resurrection, which they learned of the Persians, disciples of Zoroaster. In the time of Jesus that dogma was not even generally received. The Pharisees admitted it, and the Sadducees rejected it. (See a work translated from the English, and recently published under the name of "Hell destroyed" (*L'Enfer détruit*) in 12mo. London, 1759.) *Note de l'Editeur.*

Ibid. (3)—Independently of Mary Magdalene, who was a noted courtesan, Jesus had in his suite Joanna

wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, who according to the tradition, robbed and forsook her husband, to follow the Messiah, and assist him with her property. St Luke viii. 3.—*A.*

The passage alluded to is : 1. " And it came to pass afterward, that he went throughout every city and village, preaching and shewing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God ; and the twelve were with him. 2. And certain women, which *had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities*, Mary called Magdalene, out of whom went *seven devils* ! 3. And Joanna the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others, which ministered unto him of their substance.—*Tr.*

P. 141. (4)—The following is what a jester has said on this precept: When any one shall give you a blow on the cheek, you must instantly tender to him the other : this is a sure secret to be admitted into paradise, and perhaps to be expelled from your regiment. *Vide* La theologie portative par M. L'Abbe Bernier, 1668. *Note de l' Editeur.*

P. 142. (5)—See what is said in a note on chap. iii. where the Nazarenes are mentioned. The whole Christian doctrine is favourable to mendicants, beggars, and drones. Our prelates affirm, that the property of the church is the *patrimony of the poor, who are members of J. C.* As the priests are usually the self-styled depositories and distributors of alms, they take great care to preach up charity ; consequently in very devout countries the imbecile laity make do-

nations to monks and legacies to hospitals, which seem established only to be gainful to the administrators, but very little to the unfortunate. Besides, these establishments encourage idleness: a good government will not make so many poor, will punish mendicants by profession, force them to work when able, and provide for the wants of those who are really incapable.

P. 143. (6) M. Basnage informs us, that the Jews have a prayer called Kadiſh, in which they ſay to God: "O God, exalted and hallowed be thy name. — May thy kingdom come," &c. This prayer is the ſhort ancient one preſerved by the Jews. Hence we ſee that Jeſus was but a plagiarist, and not the author of the Lord's prayer.—Basnage hiſt. des Juifs, tome 6. p. 374.

P. 147. (7)—All the firſt Chriſtians, on the word of Chriſt and his apoſtles, expected to ſee ſoon the end of the world, which however ſtill endures. They looked day after day for the arrival of Chriſt in the *clouds of heaven*; they reckoned that he was to eſtabliſh on earth a temporal kingdom, which was to endure a thouſand years. Several holy doctors, among whom is St Ireneus, have firmly believed this fable borrowed from the *golden age*, or reign of Saturn. The church, remarking that this reign did not arrive, changed its opinion on the matter, as on many others, and declared the Millenarians heretics. St Ireneus however has left us a poetical deſcription of the abundance and ſenſual pleaſures, which this reign was to procure:

St Justin Martyr expected also this fine kingdom. See Tillemont, tome 2, p. 300. Yet one knows not how to reconcile the prediction of the near end of the world made by J. C. and the ignorance he said he was in as to the duration of the world in St Mark xiii. 32: this ignorance appears strange in a God.

P. 149. (8)—To form a true idea of Christian morality, such as it has been taught by the most esteemed doctors, one has only to read a work of the learned Barbeyrac, published on this subject under the title of *Traite de la morale des peres*, in 4to, Amsterdam, 1728.

P. 151. (9)—It is several times related in Leviticus, xvii. 11 and 14. that the *soul consists of the blood*. St Paul still farther, obscures the question of the immortality of the soul. In his 1st epistle to the Thessalonians, v. 23. not content with making man double, he makes him triple, and describes him as composed of *body, soul, and spirit*. Thereafter he gives us to understand, that the body and soul are mortal; but that the spirit is immortal. With respect to the doctrine of the *resurrection*, scholars have shown, that what the Pharisees admitted was only a *transmigration of souls*, similar to what had been taught by Pythagoras and not a resurrection like that of the Christians. See Prideaux hist. des Juifs, tome 2.

P. 151. (10)—St Ireneus says, that God is a *fire*. Origen adopts the opinion of the Pythagoreans, who made the divinity a *subtile fire, an etherial matter*.

Tertullian has positively said, that God is *a body*. In the council of Elvira it is forbidden to light wax candles in church-yards, for fear of *scaring the souls of the saints*. In the fourth century *spirituality* was not yet decreed: there was a great dispute between the monks of Egypt about God, in order to ascertain, whether he was corporeal or incorporeal: M. de Beaufobre, (in his *Hist. de Manicheisme*, tome 1. p. 207.) shews, that among the first Christian doctors, each formed of God and the soul ideas conformable to the philosophic sect, in which he had been educated. A Platonist made God incorporeal; a Pythagorean made him *an intelligent fire*, a light endowed with intelligence; an Epicurean made him a material being, an animal immortal and very happy. Many doctors revered by the church would now-a-days endanger themselves, were they not quickly to retract their errors. Moses himself would be burned by the inquisition for being both a Jew and a materialist.

CHAPTER TWELFTH.

P. 173. (3)—St Mark vi. 13. It is proper to remark here, that the Jews were in the use of anointing diseases with oil mingled with wine. We have proof of this in the Talmud of Jerusalem, where they relate a permission given by the Rabbi Simeon, son of Eleazar, to the Rabbi Meir, to mix wine with oil, in order to anoint diseases on the sabbath. The same permission is found also in the Talmud of Babylon. Beracoth, fol. 3. col. 1. and

Maazarcheni, fol. 53. col. 3. Jonna, fol. 77. col. 2. St James, who was a Nazarene or Judaizing Christian, has transferred this Hebrew usage into Christianity. See his Epistle, v. 14 and 15. Such is the origin of Holy Unction, and of the sacrament of Extreme Unction, which the Catholics give to the sick.

P. 179. *—The author mistakes; it was Andrew, Peter's brother who told this, St. John, c. vi. 8 and 9.—*Tr.*

Ibid. †—A fragment of this bread is to be seen among the reliques of St John de Lateran at Rome. Keyssler.—*Tr.*

CHAPTER THIRTEENTH.

P. 196. (10)—Theophylact assures us, that in the *Transfiguration* the apostles recognised Moses and Elias, not by their visage, which they had never seen, but by their talk.

P. 191. (83)—St Matthew, c. 13. St Mark, c. 9. St Luke, c. 9. v. 46, &c. We find in St Matthew, c. 11. v. 11. a passage embarrassing to those who believe in the divinity of Christ; he says there, that *the least in the kingdom of Heaven is greater than he*; a humility preposterous in a being, who announced himself as God.—A.

The words of St Matthew in the verse alluded to,

are, "Verily I say unto you, among them that are
 "born of woman there hath not risen a greater than
 "John the Baptist, notwithstanding he that is least in
 "the kingdom of heaven is greater than he."—The
 words "*than he*" obviously refer to John the Baptist;
 —the author's application of them therefore to Christ
 is preposterous. *Tr.*

CHAPTER FOURTEENTH.

P. 205. (2)—A modern writer informs us, that *Jesus was very beautiful*. We have a small tract in Latin on *the beauty of Christ*, composed by a Minime called Pijaret, and printed under the title of *De singulari Jesu Christi D. N. Salvatoris pulchritudine*, in 12mo, Parisiis, 1651.—In the supposititious letter of Lentulus, addressed to the Roman senate, we find an exact description of the person of Jesus.—Codex Apocryph. N. T. tome i. p. 301. Others however have maintained, that Jesus, through humility, had a very ugly visage bestowed on him.

P. 209. (6)—St John xi.—They preserve at Vendome, in the monastery of the Holy Trinity, *the sacred tear* which Jesus shed, while lamenting his friend Lazarus. M. de Thiers, having had resolution to write against the authenticity of this relic, got into a dangerous scrape with the Benedictines.

P. 210. (9)—See on the miracle of Lazarus, "Discourses on the miracles, by Woolston." A legend (according to Baronius) affirms, that the crony Lazarus went afterwards to preach the faith to the Provencals, and was the first bishop of Marseilles. As for Magdalene, she went, it is said, to bewail her sins and the death of her lover, in a desert of Provence, called *la Sainte Baume* (the Holy Balm). Martha, as every body knows, lies interred at Tarascon.

P. 212. †—At Verona are the remains of this ass, preserved in the belly of an artificial ass. It was the will of Jesus, that the beast he used should pass the rest of his days in quiet and liberty. They add, that the ass, weary with having so long gnawed on the pastures of Palestine, resolved to visit foreign countries, and to undertake a voyage by sea; he had no need, say they, of a ship; the waves became smooth, and the liquid element as hard as crystal. After he had visited the islands of Cyprus, Rhodes, Candia, Malta, and Sicily, he passed over the Gulph of Venice, and staid some days in the place where that famous city has since been built: But feeling the air to be unhealthy, and the pasturage bad, among the salt and marshy isles, Martin continued his voyage, and mounted the river Adige dry shod, and coming up to Verona, he made choice of that city for his last residence. After he had lived there some years, like an ass of estate and quality, he died, to the great grief of the confraternity. So lamentable and universal a

braying made the echoes resound through the country, and never was so sad a melody heard at the funeral of such an animal, even in Arcadia itself. But they quickly found a way to alleviate their grief; for all the honours imaginable being rendered to the blessed deceased, the devotees of Verona carefully preserve the reliques, and have put them into the belly of an artificial ass, made for that purpose, where they are kept to this day, to the great joy and edification of pious souls.—Misson. and Keyser. T.

P. 215. *—The linen towel, with which Jesus begirt himself on this occasion, and wiped his disciples feet after washing them, is still to be seen in the church of St John de Lateran at Rome. Keyser. T.

P. 215. †—The chair, in which Christ sat on this occasion, is still in the Sanctum Sanctorum of the Lateran palace, where also are exhibited a variety of missal garments made by angels, and some napkins with which the angels wiped the sweat from the face of St Laurence, as he was broiling. Keyser. T.

P. 216. (14)—It appears that the Protestants are wrong, in reproaching the Catholics with the dogma of *transubstantiation*; persons who believe that God could be incarnate, ought not to hold as ridiculous others, who say that God can be changed into bread. If the dogma of transubstantiation is an absurdity, it is a very antient one in the church, and only evinces the prodigious credulity of the first of the faithful.

St Paul, St Ignatius the martyr, St Ireneus, &c. speak of this absurd mystery like Roman Catholics.

P. 217. †—Judas's lanthorn is still preserved at Rome; he has also another at St Denis in France. Misson. T.

CHAPTER FIFTEENTH.

P. 220. (1)—One remarks with surprise, that Christ himself forgot on this occasion to put in practice the excellent counsel which he had given in the *sermon on the mount*, when a person receives a blow on the one cheek to turn the other; so true it is, that preachers do not always act as they preach to others.

P. 222. (3)—A devout magistrate has drawn up, it is said, a memoir to prove, that in the process of Jesus Christ there were thirty-two nullities, according to the criminal ordinance of Louis XIV. There certainly would not be found any nullities, according to the jurisprudence of the Inquisition, who burn blasphemers alive with a slow fire. St Louis contented himself with making their tongues be bored with a red hot iron.

P. 225. (4)—John Malila, and other fabricators of legends, inform us, that the wife of Pilate was called Procla, or Procula. They have made a saint of her. Some authors have made Pilate himself a Christian, and even a martyr. Others affirm, that Nero put

him to death, for having been concerned in the death of Christ. Others maintain, that Pilate was exiled to Vienne in Dauphiny, and killed himself.

P. 226. *—This crown must have been of large dimensions, for many portions of it are still in existence. Were a virtuoso to travel in search of them, he would require a quire of paper to make out the catalogue. Whole branches of this *crown* of thorns are preserved at Naples. T.

P. 227. (5) St Justin, Tatian, Athenagoras, Lactantius, &c. have reproached the pagans with their gods, several of whom, according to the poets, had experienced persecution and bad usage. Were not these reproaches preposterous in the mouth of the adorers of a crucified God? The partizans of the one religion perceived very well the ridiculousness of their adversaries, but never saw that of their own religion. Lactantius asks the pagans, "If it is possible to take for a God an exile, obliged to fly or forced to conceal himself? Nobody," says he, "is fool enough to do so; for he who flies or conceals himself, shews that he fears violence or death."—Lanct. Instit. Divin. l. i. c. 13.

Ibid. * This inscription, in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, may be seen in the church of the holy cross at Rome, as also a finger of St Thomas, &c. This church is, for its antiquity and number of reliques, one of the most remarkable in Rome; at it an indulgence may be obtained at once for six thousand and twenty-

eight years; but in this respect it is outdone by the church of St John de Lateran, where plenary indulgences may be had for twenty-nine thousand years. In the church of the Annunciation at Rome, indulgences may be procured for ten thousand years.—Keysser. *Tr.*

P. 228. * Pitiful indeed is that church, which does not possess one or more pieces of the wood of the true cross. It is a true saying, that there is as much wood of the true cross preserved as would build a seventy-four gun ship. The cross of the *St Good Thief* (for he too has been beatified) is still in the church of the Holy Cross of Jerusalem at Rome, with the *tail of Baalam's Ass*, and St Paul's *thorn* (*organum gener.*) *Tr.*

P. 228. (7)—St Matthew xxvii. 44. St Mark xv. 32. St Luke xxiii. 39, &c. It is said, that Jesus when dying exclaimed, *Eli! Eli! lamma sabbañani!* or complained to God his Father of being abandoned by him. This complaint was very preposterous in the mouth of Christ, who ought to have known, what he was to expect, as the part he played was agreed on with his father from all eternity. At least we may suppose, that this exclamation was but a feint meant to deceive the spectators—a conduct little becoming a divinity.

P. 228. (8)—According to the gospel of The Infancy of Jesus, chap. xxx. Judas was possessed of a devil from his infancy, and would bite every body, when the demon agitated him;—he bit one day the little

Jesus on the side, who fell a weeping : Satan came out of Judas under the form of a mad dog. Codex Apocryph. N. T. tome. 1. p. 197. Some heretical Christians have much esteemed Judas Iscariot, maintaining that without him the mystery of the redemption could not have been accomplished ;—an idea not destitute of reason. Indeed, why blame a man, who, by selling his master, was only the instrument of the salvation of the universe, and executor of the decrees of God himself? These heretics have also a gospel, of which they make Judas the author. St Ireneus, b. 1. contra. Hæres. c. 35.

P. 229. (9)—Some writers pretend, that the eclipse here spoken of has been attested by *Tballus*, an author wholly unknown, and by *Phlegon*, whose work no longer exists, but has been cited by Julius Africanus, a Christian author of the third century. This Phlegon says merely, that in the fourth year of 202d Olympiad there was a considerable eclipse, but this has nothing marvellous in it.

P. 230. *—Part of the iron of the spear, which made this incision, is still to be seen in St Peter's church at Rome, where also is exhibited an impression of Christ's bloody face on a linen cloth. The pretended holy handkerchief is the most valued relic at Turin : but, though it ought to be the only one of its kind in the world, it is reproduced or multiplied in five or six different places. There are two of them at Rome, one at Cadoin in Perigord, one at Befancon, one at Compeigne, one at Milan, and another at Aix-

la-Chapelle. They all produce papal bulls to confirm their titles, but the handkerchief of Cadoin seems to have the advantage, as being authenticated by fourteen bulls, whereas that of Turin can only show four.—Keyser and Miffon. *Tr.*

Ibid. (10)—If the punishment of Jesus is proved by the gospel, some circumstances may create a doubt whether he died immediately. We are told, that they did not break his legs, according to custom. His friends had the liberty of taking away his body, and they might take care of his wounds, on finding that he was not dead, and in this manner bring him back to life, at least for some time. It is proper to observe, that they laid him in a tomb quite new, from whence his disciples had perhaps taken care to get him out in time. We however thought it our duty to follow the vulgar opinion, in supposing that Jesus was actually dead.

P. 231. (11)—It is not surprising, that a pagan should doubt the resurrection of Christ. From the first days of the church several Christians have not believed it, perceiving very plainly the incongruity of supposing, that the Son of God could die; they have therefore denied the death of their divine master. On this subject the followers of Basilides affirm, that Jesus at the time of his passion assumed the appearance of Simon the Cyrenean, and transferred to him his own, under which the said Simon was crucified in his stead, while Christ, who beheld this without being himself seen, laughed at their mistake.—St Ire-

neus, lib. i. c. 23. S. Epiph. hærs. xxiv. num. 3. The Cerinthians, or disciples of Cerinthus, who was contemporary with the apostles, and the Carpocratians, denied in like manner, that Jesus could have been actually crucified. Some have maintained, that the traitor Judas was punished in place of his master. Yet these sectaries regarded Christ as a mere man, and not as a god. Thus we find Christians contemporary with the apostles believing in Christ, and yet, like heretics, doubting of his death.—M. de Tillemont, tome 2. p. 221. St Epiph. hom. 24, 28, 30. Theodoret Hæretic. fab. lib. 1.

P. 231. (12)—The celebrated Blondel, le Fevre de Saumur and other good critics, have shown, that the passage of the historian Josephus, where he speaks in praise of Jesus, has been visibly interpolated, by a *pious fraud* of Christians. This fraud is likewise very ably exposed in an excellent dissertation in manuscript by the late M. l'Abbe de Longuerue, which the author has communicated to me. If the passage, favourable to Jesus, had been really written by Josephus, that historian could not, without being guilty of an absurdity, dispense with becoming a Christian.

The devout forgers of writings, who anciently fabricated vouchers for the Christian religion, have taken care to counterfit with as much good faith, *two letters of Pilate*, addressed to the emperor Tiberius, in which this idolatrous governor speaks of Jesus, his miracles, death, and resurrection in the same tone, the most zealous disciple could have employed. We have also a testimony as authentic in a letter of one *Lentu-*

lus to the Roman senate. Although these supposititious pieces may be now rejected by the church, they were adopted by Christians in the time of Tertullian, as may be seen in his Apolog. c. 5. 21. These letters are found entire in the Codex Apocryp: N. T. tome 1. p. 298, &c.

CHAPTER SIXTEENTH.

P. 233. (1)—The ancient framers of the Gospels have fabricated one, which they have ascribed to Nicodemus. In it we learn, how Christ passed his time after his death till his resurrection:—His journey to hell, the deliverance of the patriarchs, the discomfiture of Satan, &c. All these details are attested by two dead persons, raised up again, who came purposely from the other world, to acquaint Annanias, Caiaphas, and the doctors of Judea, of these events. Codex Apocryph. N. T. tom. 1. p. 238, &c.

P. 241. *—A piece of this stone, which the angel probably dropt from the clouds, while carrying it off, is to be seen under the high altar, in the Sanctum Sanctorum of the Lateran Palace. Keyser. T.

P. 252. (15)—The fable of the ascension of Christ is visibly borrowed from that of the ascension of Romulus and Julius Cesar, which Lactantius however finds very ridiculous. Lactant. Institut. b. 1. 15.

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P. 253. (16)—We have given enow examples of the fables contained in the different gospels, published and adopted by the different sects of Christianity. These fables demonstrate both the impudent juggling of the forgers, who composed such romances, and the astonishing stupidity of the different sectaries, who believed them.—It is also proper to observe, that the *Acts of the Apostles*, composed by St Luke, relate only with minuteness the transactions of St Paul his master, and give us scarcely any information of the success or fate of his brethren. Yet other romance writers have worthily supplied this defect. One *Abdias*, among others, has transmitted us in nine books, the *Apostolic History*, but fraught with so many fables, prodigies, and absurdities, that the church has thought itself obliged to reject them, at a time when its children had no longer the simplicity of the first ages: Ignorance however has at times yielded to this ancient credulity; and weak people and knaves have existed who piously revived the fables and traditions of the ancient romance-writers. These are the only memoirs we possess concerning the apostles; specimens of them will be found at the end of tome 1. of the *Codex Apocryph. N. T.*

CHAPTER SEVENTEENTH.

P. 256. (1)—See Philo on *Contemplative Life*. The first fathers of the church, struck with the conformity found between the manners, which Philo at-

tributes to the Theraputes, and those of the first Christians, do not entertain a doubt but that they were the persons, this learned Jew meant to point out under the name of Theraputes, or contemplative Essenians. It is certain, that in the time of the historian Josephus, three sects were reckoned in Judæa, the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the Essenians, or Essenes. From the time of that writer, there is no longer any mention made of the latter; hence some learned men have concluded, that these Essenians, or Theraputes, were afterwards confounded and incorporated with the first Christians, who, according to every evidence, led a kind of life perfectly similar to theirs. Le Clerc Biblioth. Universelle, tom. 4. p. 525, &c. and Bernard's Nouvelles de la Republ. des Lettres, tom. 35. p. 503.

P. 259. (2)—In like manner we have seen, some years ago in Paris, on the tomb of *Deacon Paris*, miracles wrought in presence of very intelligent persons, who dared neither to criticise nor contradict them, for fear of being maltreated by a populace obstinate in seeing prodigies, and whom impostors would not have failed to excite against those, who should have pretended to see only rogueries: The author of this work was like to have had a very serious affair with the people in the church-yard of St Medard, for having the temerity to laugh on seeing the capers of Abbe Becherand.

P. 261. *—In the cathedral of Ravenna is preserved one of the stones, with which St Stephen was stoned. Miffon. T.

P. 264. (4)—See the Acts of the Apostles, c. 9. The author has composed a work, under the title of *Essai de critique sur la Vie et les Ecritures de St Paul*, (*Critical Essay on the Life and Writings of St Paul*,) which may be regarded as a complement to this. We find there the spirit and character of the Apostle of the Gentiles.

P. 265. (5)—The first proselytes, the Apostles made among the Jews, as we have elsewhere said, were called Nazarenes or Ebionites, who believed in Jesus without forsaking the law of Moses on that account. Of consequence, they regarded St Paul as an heretic or an apostate. This fact, attested by Origen, Eusebius, and St Epiphanius, is important, in giving us a distinct idea of primitive Christianity, which we see divided into two sects, almost as soon as St Paul had embraced it. In fact, this new apostle very soon separated himself from his brethren to preach a doctrine different from theirs, and openly undermined the Judaism which St Peter, St James, and all the other heads of the church persisted in respecting. But as St Paul had success among the Gentiles, his party prevailed; Judaism was entirely proscribed, and Christianity became quite a new religion, of which Judaism had been only the figure. Thus St Paul changed wholly the religious system of Christ, who had proposed only to reform Judaism, professed the law of Moses, and declared himself to have come on purpose to *accomplish, and not to abolish it*. The principal Apostles followed the conduct of their master, and shewed themselves much attached to the law and

usages of their fathers. St Paul, notwithstanding their protestations, took a different rout; he displayed a contempt or indifference for the legal ordinances, to which, we however observe, that through policy he sometimes subjected himself. Thus we find he circumcised Timothy, and performed Jewish ceremonies in the temple of Jerusalem.

Not content with decrying the law of Moses, St Paul, by his own confession, preached a gospel of his own. He says positively, in his epistle to the Galatians, chap. i. 11, &c. "That the gospel which he preaches is not after men," and that he has received it by a particular revelation of Jesus Christ. He speaks likewise of his quarrels with the other heads of the sect; but over these his disciple St Luke passes very slightly in the Acts, which are much more the *Acts of Paul* than the Acts of the Apostles. It appears evident, that he embroiled himself with his brethren, partizans of the circumcision, and founders of the Nazarenes or Ebionites, *i. e.* reformed Jews converted to Jesus. They had a gospel little conformable to that of Paul, as they combined the law of Christ with that of Moses. Moreover, St Irenæus, St Justin, St Epiphanius, Eusebius, Theodoret, and St Augustine, agree in telling us, that these Ebionites, or converted Jews, regarded Jesus as a "mere man, son of Joseph and Mary, to whom they gave the name of Son of God, only on account of his virtues." From this it would appear, that it was St Paul, who deified Jesus, and abolished Judaism. The Paulites, become the strongest, prevailed over the Ebionites, or disciples

of the apostles, and treated them as heretics; hence we see, it is the religion of St Paul, and not that of Jesus Christ, which subsists at this day amongst us.

P. 266. (6)—All superstitions have resemblances and affinities. The heathens found in their religion relations conformable to Christianity. They had Sibyls, oracles, and predictions. Their mythology exhibited gods dethroned and replacing one another. In it we see gods persecuted, exiled, and put to death; an Osiris killed by Typhon, and raised again from the dead; an Apollo expelled from heaven; an Adonis, &c. We find especially many points of conformity between Esculapius and Jesus Christ. The heathen god was son of Apollo and the maid Boebias*; and performed, like Jesus, a great number of miraculous cures. He was punished and thunderstruck by Jupiter, for having raised the dead, and restored them to a better life. After his death he too went, and rejoined the god his father.

The fathers of the church themselves have found striking conformities between Jesus and Prometheus, who was called *The wisdom of the father*. He was punished by Jupiter for having saved the human race, who were on the point of being precipitated into Tartarus. Suidas says, they gave to Prometheus a surname, which signifies *he who died for the people*. He was crucified on Caucasus, and Tertullian speaks of crosses found there. His blood produced a plant, which rendered invulnerable. See the treatise

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* The nymph Coronis. See Ainsworth, voce Æscul. T.

of M. de Rondel, intituled, *De la superstition*. (on superstition) Amsterdam, 1686, in 18mo p. 115—118.

The same author observes, that the heathens had some ideas of the trinity. The same god was styled Jupiter in heaven, Mercury on earth, and Pluto in hell. See p. 106. Mercury is called Hermes in Greece, which signifies *interpreter*; this god and son of Jupiter, is often called *the word interpreted*. The mystery of the Trinity is owing to Plato, who of the *goodness, wisdom, and power* of God, has made three *hypostases*, that is, has personified these divine attributes. See *Platonisme dévoilé*, (Platonism unveiled) p. 65.

In fact we know, that the heathens admitted a hell or Tartarus, a last judgment, genii, angels, demons; *metamorphoses* or *incarnations*; in a word, a thousand fables, analogous to those of Christians. Several of their philosophers have believed in the end of the world; and that doctrine, according to Lactantius, favoured wonderfully the preachers of the gospel.

P. 267. (7) From the infancy of Christianity there have been people, who have denied the authenticity of the gospels. *Marcias* accused them of being filled with falsehoods. The Aloges and Theodotians rejected especially the gospel according to St John, which they regarded as a tissue of lies. See Tillimont Memoires, tome 2. p. 256. St Epiph. Hæresis. 51. Tillimont. t. 2. p. 438. St. Augustin in his *confessions*, l. 7. c. 9. says, that he has found in the Platonists the whole beginning of the gospel of St John. Origen (*contra Celsum*) informs us, that this heathen

reproached Christ with having taken from Plato the finest maxims, which the gospel attributes to him, and among others the one which says, that "it is more easy for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to be saved.—i. 6.

P. 268. (8)—Those who may doubt the truth of this assertion, to be convinced have only to read the works of the disciples of Plato, who were all superstitious persons and Theurgists, whose ideas are sufficiently analogous to those of Christians. We find indeed these writings filled with receipts to make the gods and good genii descend, and to drive away the bad, &c. See particularly *Platonisme dévoilé*, composed by one Souverain, of the sect of the Socinians, and printed at Cologne in 1700, in 8vo. Tertullian reproaches the heretics of his time with having wandered astray in order to introduce Platonism, Stoicism, and Dialectics into Christianity. *Viderint qui Stoicum, & Platicum, et Dialecticum Christianismum protulerunt.* Tertull. de præscription. adv. hæres. c. 3. It was evidently the mixture of the unintelligible doctrine of Plato, with the Dialectics of Aristotle, which rendered theology so senseless, disputable, and fraught with subtilties. The cardinal Pallavicini acknowledges, that "without Aristotle the Christians would have wanted a great number of articles of faith."

P. 270. (9)—We may see from the apologies of St Justin, Tatian, Athenagoras, Tertullian, and Arnobius, that to the first Christians the most abominable crimes were imputed, such as eating little children,

being irreligious and sacriligious, committing incontinences and incest in their nocturnal assemblies. It was pretended, that they fastened a dog to a candlestick, and when by means of this the light was extinguished, the sexes coupled promiscuously. These opinions, spread abroad among the people, irritated them against the Christians, whom they regarded as the cause of the wrath of the gods, and of the public calamities. We accordingly see that even under the mildest emperors, the popular fury kindled persecutions.

271 (10)—*Martyr* in Greek signifies *witness*. But, with the exception of the apostles, (whose actions have been transmitted to us only by the forgers of legends), what kind of testimony could men, who had never seen Jesus, bear him, and who could know him only from the stories told them by preachers, who had what they themselves knew of him only by a very suspicious tradition? A martyr is in general only a fool, duped by another fool, who was the dupe of a knave, whose object was to establish a sect, and who himself frequently was punished for his projects.

P. 272. (11)—The learned H. Dodwell has written two copious dissertations on the martyrs: the one to prove, that they were not so numerous as is commonly imagined; and the other to demonstrate, that their constancy can be ascribed only to very natural causes. Dodwell's *Dissertationes Cyprianicæ*, in 8vo, Oxoniæ, 1684. It cannot however be denied, that the frenzy of martyrdom was an epidemical disease among the first Christians, to which their spiritual phy-

ficians were themselves obliged to apply remedies, as these wretched beings were guilty of suicide.

P. 273. (12)—The missions have for their particular object to extend the power of the heads of the church. The pope sends enthusiasts or knaves to the extremities of the earth to beat up for subjects. The missionaries there transact their business vastly well, and open to themselves new branches of commerce, while they act with prudence. The insolence and imprudence of the Jesuits have occasioned the proscription of the Christian religion in Japan, China, &c. Our missionaries are every where well received in the beginning, and in general suffer martyrdom only, when their real designs are discovered.

P. 275. (13)—See *La Christianisme dévoilé*, par M. Boulanger, published in 1766, in 8vo, c. xv. and *La Contagion sacrée*, a work translated from the English of Trenchard, and published in 1768, wherein is shown the grievous influence of superstition on government. *Note de l'Editeur.*

CHAPTER EIGHTEENTH.

P. 277. (1)—It is evident that Constantine, notwithstanding the eulogiums the Christians have bestowed on him, was an abominable prince, stained with the murder of his wife, his son, and his colleague. He sought, it is said, in vain for expiation in the hea-

then religion, but found them only in the Christian. If he was really a Christian, his example will serve, like many others, to prove, that a person may be at once very devout and very wicked.

P. 277. (2)—It is well established, that Constantine, his children, and especially Theodosius, used unheard of violences in order to annihilate paganism. To be convinced of this, one has but to read the Theodosian code, xvi. tit. x: *de Paganis, Sacrificiis, et Templis*.

Ibid. (3)—St Epiphany, who wrote in the 4th century of the Christian æra, informs us, that in his time there were already *four score heresies* or sects, into which Christians were divided. St Irenæus, who lived in the 2d century, had, before him, already refuted a great number. Since then, we have beheld heresies multiplying in the church without number; but this is not surprising. In works so contradictory, so obscure, and so absurd, as those of which the Testament is composed, every one may find whatever he is in need of, to prop up systems the most opposite and extravagant.

P. 279. (4)—Except the English, all Protestant Christians reject *Episcopacy*, and regard it as an usurped power. Among the Catholics, the Jansenists think the same, which is the true cause of the enmity the Pope and bishops display against them. It appears St Jerome was, on this point, of the opinion of the Jansenists. Yet we see St Paul at first much occupied in advancing the Episcopal dignity. St Ignatius of An-

tioch, disciple of the Apostles, insinuates, in his epistles, the high opinion which the Christians ought to have of a bishop. In short, the very antient author of the Apostolic Constitutions, l. 1. c. 2. openly declares, that *a bishop is a god on earth, destined to rule over all men, priests, kings, and magistrates*. Although these *Constitutions* are reputed Apocryphal, the bishops have conformed their conduct to them more than to the canonical gospel, wherein Jesus, far from assigning prerogatives to bishops, declares, that in his kingdom there will be *neither first nor last*.

P. 281. (5)—Besides, it was at Rome the most opulent Christians resided. The Romish church gave large charities to the faithful in the provinces; its bishop was the richest, and even in the time of the pagans, the Roman see was the object of the ambition and contests of the priests, who wrangled among themselves for the flock of Jesus.

P. 282. (6)—Several authors have denied, and with much reason, that St Peter ever set a foot in Rome. In the acts of the Apostles, no mention is made of this journey, unless we suppose that St Luke has omitted to speak of St Peter, who was a Nazarene or Ebionite, to attribute to St Paul his master the conversion of the capital. See what has been said before of the squabbles of St Paul with the Judaizing Apostles. If St Peter had been at Rome, his gospel would have been forced to yield to that of the Apostle of the Gentiles, more accommodating to the heathens, as it dispensed with circumcision. It may there-

fore be presumed, that St Paul was the first Pope. *Hist. des Papes*, tome I. *Lettres et Monumens des Peres Apostoliques*, par Abraham Ruchat, in 8vo, Leyde, 1738. Fr. Spanheim *fijii dissertat. iv.* Lugd. Batav. 1679.

P. 283. (7)—Christianity condemns suicide; yet we admire, as models of perfection, and as personages endowed with supernatural graces, men and women, who, by penitence and senseless austerities, evidently abridge their days. It is asserted, that the religious of La Trappe ended their lives in a few years, dying of phthisis. Is it then more criminal in one to kill himself at once, than to labour ten years at his own destruction? If mankind were more consistent, they would perceive, that it is very ridiculous to condemn a suicide, and drag his carcase into the street, while they regard a frantic monk, or an enthusiastic wench, as saints agreeable to God.

P. 285. (8)—In the time the author wrote, he did not foresee that the Jesuits, alluded to in the text, would one day be expelled with ignominy from the countries, where their power seemed best established.
Note de l'Editeur.

P. 286. (9)—The Protestants have persecuted, as well as the Romish clergy. Calvin caused Servetus to be burnt at Geneva, while they burned Calvinists at Paris. The Anabaptists have committed unheard of excesses in Germany. The English liturgy made Charles I. lose his head, who wanted to introduce it

into Scotland. In Holland the Gomarists have warmly persecuted the Armenians.

P. 287. (10)—The gospel contradicts itself incessantly: It blows hot and cold on the article of toleration, which is very convenient for theologians, whatever side they take. When their party is the weakest, they rest on passages which recommend mildness; but so soon as that party gets the upperhand, they are then authorised by other passages to crush their adversaries.

P. 288. (11)—The learned Abbe Fleury agrees as to these facts, in his *Mœurs des Chrétiens*, partie 5. § 54. where he says, that *Christians ought to observe exactly what is practised in the most orderly monasteries, to become living examples of Christian morality*. Thus, by his confession, a good Christian is a true monk; now a monk is a citizen dead to society. What would become of a country where every body should pretend to Christian perfection, to attain which each was to aim? There would be neither merchants, nor soldiers, nor married persons.

P. 289. (12)—It is asserted, and repeated every day, that religion is necessary, and that it is *a check*. It is necessary only to open our eyes to be convinced, that religion, among high and low, restrains nobody, not even the priests who preach and live by it. The most devout nations of Europe, such as the Italians, Portuguese, and Spaniards, are alike distinguished by

their bigotry and corruption of manners; the clergy themselves shew them the example of perfidy, cruelty, and the most unbridled licentiousness. To restrain men, there is need neither of falsehoods nor fables; but of good laws, good education, cultivated reason, talents, science, good examples, rewards, and equitable punishments. As chimeras only are opposed to the irregularities of mankind, they are not capable of vanquishing their inclinations.

P. 291. (13)—A Scotchman published at London, in 1699, a book under the title of *Job. Craigii, Scoti, theologiæ Christianæ principia mathematica*, wherein he endeavours to prove, that every thing founded on the testimony of men, whether inspired or not inspired, is only probable, and that its probability diminishes in proportion as mankind recede from the time the witnesses lived, on whose testimony they believe. On this principle he makes an algebraical calculation, according to which he affirms, that it is probable the Christian religion will endure still 1454 years, at the end of which its probability of endurance will be reduced to nothing. But he supposes, that the last judgment must arrive in time to prevent this total eclipse of the faith. Whether these calculations and conjectures be true or false, one may apply to the religion of Jesus, what Lactantius said of the heathen mythology; according to which Jupiter had dethroned his father Saturn: *Video alium Deum fuisse regem primis temporibus, alium consequentibus. Potest ergo fieri, ut alius sit postea futurus. Si enim regnum prius mutatum est; cur*

desperemus etiam posterius posse mutari? Lactant. Institut. divin. lib. i. c. 11. If God was weary of the Jewish religion, why may he not become weary of the Christian?

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